

# Oriental Bird Club

SPECIAL  
INDIA ISSUE



Bulletin 22 • December 1995





## The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

■ encourage an interest  
in the birds of the  
Oriental region and their  
conservation.

■ liaise with and  
promote the work of  
existing regional  
societies.

■ collate and publish  
material on Oriental  
birds.

Two bulletins and a journal,  
*Forktail*, are published annually

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### Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and costs £12 per annum (£8 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries), £16 Family, £20 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £20 Libraries and academic institutions, and £36 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.



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# Editorial



This issue is the last that I shall be involved with as Bulletin editor. In the four years and eight issues during my tenure as editor the Bulletin has continued to evolve in design. The contents have essentially remained the same since the Club's first issue in 1985, but we have begun new sections such as *Clubwatch* and *Free Press*, we have tried to increase conservation news from the region in *Conservation Fund in Action* and *Around the Orient*, and we have solicited more articles on field identification. There are now more pages, more colour, and in each of the last three years we have also produced birding itinerary supplements. These changes have, I hope, provided greater scope for promoting the Club's aims, and given greater benefits to all Club members.

In my opening editorial (OBC Bull. 15), which also marked the first Bulletin in the new format and design, I reported that OBC Council had decided to go for improved design and production quality in the hope that it would increase membership which, after initial growth, had stayed the same for a couple of years. This hope has now been realised as membership has grown over the four years from 800 to nearly 1,500 members, and with no signs of slowing we may even reach our target of 2,000 by the year 2000.

Perhaps another indication that OBC has the right ethos has been the emergence in the last two years of the Neotropical and African Bird Clubs. These clubs mirror OBC's aims for their particular regions and both have already established themselves by publishing excellent bulletins, *Cotinga* and *Bulletin of the African Bird Club*, both of which follow similar formats to our own.

My opening editorial also drew attention to our wish to receive more unsolicited material for publication, but many articles are still commissioned by the editorial Committee. Interestingly, the need to seek articles constantly is the opposite problem to the Neotropical Bird Club's *Cotinga*, which already has a substantial amount of material for 1996. OBC is different because we also have our journal, *Forktail*, but I think it does indicate that too many articles in our Bulletin are being requested. This is a disappointment to me because

although OBC is run by members on a council to carry out the Club's aims it ultimately exists for the benefit of other members, and so the Club's publications are an important expression of the members' involvement. So I urge any members wanting to write articles or send information for the news sections to do so by contacting OBC's chairman.

The cost of producing each Bulletin has inevitably increased as more pages and more colour are added but, as we hoped, these costs have been kept to a minimum and offset from advertising revenue and Corporate Supporters. The 30 advertisements in this issue and support from Canon and Focalpoint are not only a testimony to OBC's commitment to maintain high standards at an affordable cost but also to the great efforts of our Promotions Officer, Nick Gardner, which will be greatly missed by the Club as he takes a well-earned rest from OBC Council. Production costs have also been held in check thanks to the tremendous help of Bob and Scott Hibbert with colour reproduction and from the advice and hard work of Rob Still and Rob Innes with layout, design and typesetting.

Of course, no amount of design innovation and flair over the last four years could make poor subject matter readable, so I hope members will agree that the Bulletin contents have remained of high quality. Maintaining standards has been the job of a dedicated Editorial Committee and I warmly thank Helen Taylor, Mike Crosby, Guy Dutson, Jonathan Eames, Richard Grimmett, Rob Innes, Tim Inskipp, Frank Lambert, Colin Poole, Michael Rank, Nigel Redman and Craig Robson, who have all been involved during the past four years, for their help. I particularly thank Tim Inskipp for always helping and advising no matter how short the notice and regardless of the other great pressures on his time.

*Adrian Long*



# Guest editorial



True to its tradition and culture Asia always has its wise men and women. Whether it is art, culture, religion, philosophy, morality, or statecraft there was a Confucius or a Mahatma to shape and guide the destinies of generations. Asian ornithology too has its share of men of destiny - Yamashina of Japan, Boonsong of Thailand, Cheng of China and Sálím Ali of India - whose contributions not only enriched our knowledge but also inspired a new generation of ornithologists and bird enthusiasts.

The Indian subcontinent, ranging from Afghanistan to Burma, and including the formidable Himalayas, was explored, studied and written about by a number of itinerant scholars, adventurers, and naturalists. The systematic ornithology of the region was shaped by stalwarts like Hume, Whistler, Baker, Hodgson, Oates and Jerdon and a band of amateur but equally competent natural history collectors. It was in this background that Sálím Ali ventured to stake his presence as an ornithologist of equal calibre. His forays into what was then the exclusive domain of the ruling 'Sahibs' and the struggle to overcome handicaps are well known through his many writings including his delightfully rendered autobiography.

It would not be wrong to say that Sálím Ali was a man with two personalities. There was the 'scientific' side of him known only to close confidants, staff and students. This was as a man of strict regimen to be followed both by himself and his 'chelas' and staff. Always painstakingly meticulous in his ways, he would not tolerate shoddiness of any kind and would make his displeasure known in no uncertain terms. He had a phenomenal and quick temper and only the stout-hearted of his disciples and staff could survive one of his severe tongue-lashings. It took considerable effort to gain his trust. He took personal interest in his students and staff once they were conditioned to his exacting standards, and guided their work meticulously. Thereafter it was a one-to-one relationship. All his students - over a dozen - and colleagues always treasure their association with him.

Though very meticulous in making field observations and recording data, Sálím Ali had no patience with modern statistical jugglery, of which he claimed ignorance. His approach was methodical, relying on direct observation and

logical deduction rather than hypothetical inference. However, he would not object to his students applying statistical hypothesis in their work provided they could convince him.

Sálím Ali's forte was his delightful writings. It was perhaps this, coupled with his keen sense of humour, that made up his second personality. His first offering, *The Book of Indian Birds*, became instantly popular. The book went into several editions and still continues to be the most sought-after reference material for birdwatchers. His other books, *Indian Hill Birds*, *The Birds of Kerala*, *The Birds of Sikkim* and *The Birds of the Eastern Himalayas* followed with equal success. The latter were products of his many ornithological surveys conducted in close association with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). The *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan* followed soon after, researched and written in association with Dillon Ripley, with BNHS playing the anchor role.

Sálím Ali's association with BNHS had two distinct phases. The first began with his various Indian States Ornithological Surveys, results of which were published with inputs from Hugh Whistler. The fieldwork and the results thereafter firmly established Sálím Ali as a leading figure in the BNHS. Until this time his contributions were based on his involvement as a field researcher, which brought him accolades from both home and overseas. In the meantime his pre-war stint with Stresemann in Germany had brought him into contact with many international ornithological heavyweights with whom he kept up a steady correspondence.

The second phase began perhaps soon after India's independence. This is the phase when Sálím Ali was to exert his best influence, not only on the ornithology but on the nature conservation of the region as a whole. At one level, his close relationship with Dillon Ripley and on the other



with Nehru and later Mrs Indira Gandhi enabled him to play the key role in shaping and guiding the conservation movement in India. As the President of the BNHS he virtually changed its image to a dynamic institution in research and education, with an equally active membership.

Most of the activities of BNHS at this time were understandably biased towards ornithology. At a time when securing finances for natural history studies was not very easy, BNHS under Sálim Ali's stewardship was able to raise substantial funding for large-scale fieldwork. First of the series of project funding obtained was, inevitably, for the Bird Migration studies in 1969. Ripley, as Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, was instrumental in channelling the funds to BNHS. This enabled BNHS to not only monitor the migration strategy of birds in the region but also, in the process, generate interest and train fieldworkers in natural history. I was one of the lucky 'products' of this project, V. S. Vijayan being the other.

Subsequent projects were mostly financed by Ripley/Smithsonian. These comprised of small surveys in Simlipal in Orissa, Melghat in Maharashtra and Bhutan Himalayas, and helped, in a way, to gather information for the preparation of the *Handbook*. Ripley and Sálim Ali took part in the field trips mainly to exchange notes and hold discussions while the field staff assisted in surveying and collecting specimens. There was unfortunately no large-scale fieldwork between 1972 and 1980 owing to scarcity of funds.

The second 'wave' of fieldwork grants came as a proverbial windfall. At one stroke three of Society's project proposals were picked up by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Ministry of Environment, Government of India, as a part of the Indo-US PL-480 fund programme. A fourth came through the Defence Ministry of the Government of India. The combined total budget of these projects was equivalent to US\$1,670,000 for five years - a phenomenal figure by any NGO standards!

Sálim Ali, as the Principal Investigator, was understandably apprehensive about the limited capacity of BNHS in implementing these projects. Credit goes to J. C. Daniel who, as the CEO of BNHS, boldly took on the challenge and mobilised the senior research staff to prepare a comprehensive action plan. Under his constant support and encouragement and Sálim Ali's guidance, three of the senior research staff put our heads down to carry out the task.

It was indeed a formidable task to build up a well-trained and dedicated team of multidisciplinary field researchers, but the task was made easier with Sálim Ali's constant presence as the stern-yet-benevolent patriarch. He was the ultimate role-model to all the budding field ecologists and this fact provided the perfect foil in our pep talks as well as a tool when reprimanding sub-standard work. Apart from implementing research programmes which resulted in the conservation and management of many species and habitats, the projects had another major spin-off in the form of setting up an excellent and dedicated band of field researchers at the BNHS. This factor was the root cause of the birth of the Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON).

In the 1980's Sálim was a well-known personality throughout South Asia, thanks to constant exposure in the media. Two documentaries, one by the Films Division of India and the other by the BBC, were being shown constantly in cinema houses, on TV and at nature conferences. The name and the frail figure with white beard was instantly recognised everywhere. Perhaps the most significant impact of all this was on thousands of school children in India. His public image was further enhanced by his ready wit. He was constantly invited to give talks at schools, colleges and institutions. The Indian Academy of Administration, the training ground of elite bureaucrats of India's administrative force, invited him to speak on environmental conservation to its recruits every year. The products of the Academy who went on to take up administrative reins of India's bureaucratic network remembered him and his advice very well and were often instrumental in helping environmental causes.

Equally significant was Sálim Ali's personal rapport with Jawharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, and later his daughter Mrs Indira Gandhi. Both father and daughter had great interest in nature and respected the grand old man of Indian natural history in the true Asian tradition. They sought his advice constantly on environment protection matters. One spin-off from this relationship was that almost all the government functionaries down the line, political and bureaucratic, not only followed suit but almost bent over backwards in indicating their willingness to listen to environmental issues. It is perhaps a measure of the importance of Sálim Ali's



role as the conscience keeper of India's environment that he was nominated as Member of Parliament by Rajiv Gandhi's government. He personally disliked to be herded into what he felt was a political arena but quickly realised the advantage of pushing environmental issues at appropriate levels. Though he did not actually attend any parliamentary sessions, he nevertheless carried on his crusade from the wings.

In the ancient Sanskrit there is a term called Yuga Purusha. It literally means 'Man of Age' - in English, Man for All Seasons, although the connotations differ slightly. Yuga Purusha is the one who combines several virtues and is appointed by Divine Will to fulfil a certain role in

a given time-frame. He cannot help but play the appointed role, no matter how good, bad or indifferent his personal qualities happen to be. He is essentially a catalyst. Sálím Ali perhaps fits that role in the South Asian context. As is happening elsewhere in the world, in India too there is today a greater awareness and appreciation of natural wealth. There is an increasing interest in birds, animals, plants, insects and nature in general, both for their aesthetic and economic values, particularly amongst the younger generation. Inevitably, the Yuga Purusha has departed but the spark he lit will continue to glow for a long time to come.

S. A. Hussain

## Club News



### Forthcoming OBC Meetings

The **11th OBC Winter Meeting and AGM** will take place on Saturday 9 December 1995 at the Meeting Rooms of the Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London. There will be a full programme of talks, including 'Birds of Borneo' by Clive Mann, 'Buntings of the Orient' by Urban Olsson, and a talk by Simon Dowell of the World Pheasant Association on conservation of Galliformes in the Oriental region. There will be the usual sales stalls, raffle and refreshments, and a unique opportunity to purchase the newly published *Buntings and Sparrows* signed by both authors and the artist.

In 1996, as well as the regular Blakeney and London meetings, there will be a joint meeting with the **Dorset Bird Club** at Upton Community Centre, near Poole, over the Easter weekend. The meeting is scheduled for Saturday 6 April, from 13.30 - 18.00. There will be three talks: Guy Dutson on island endemism in Indonesia and the Philippines, Mark Beaman on Central Asia, and Ian Lewis on wetlands of central China and the Russian Far East. Further details will be given in a flyer with *Forktail* 11. It is hoped that members will be able to combine the meeting with a good weekend's birding on the south coast, hopefully coinciding with the first of the summer migrants.

### Exhibitors at meetings

Anyone wishing to have a stand at any OBC meeting in order to sell goods or advertise their products must contact the Meetings Officer in advance. It is expected that all exhibitors should make an agreed donation to the Club, in cash or in kind, unless specifically excluded through a Corporate Sponsorship agreement or a reciprocal charity arrangement.

### Subscriptions

Council has decided to maintain the current subscription rates for 1996. However, after five years at these levels, it will be necessary to increase subscriptions in 1997. The ordinary subscription will rise from £12 to £15 in 1997, and other membership categories will be increased by a similar percentage.

Members will shortly receive a letter indicating if they have paid in advance for 1996 or if they pay by standing order; in either of these cases, no further action is necessary. All other members are requested to return their re-subscription forms as soon as possible.

As postage costs continue to soar, members who receive their Bulletins by airmail may wish to consider contributing to the airmail cost by making an additional donation when re-subscribing.



## 1995 Mega Prize Draw– more prizes than ever!

If you have been disappointed by the National Lottery, then you should try your chances with this year's Mega Prize Draw offering over fifty prizes. Members in the UK have automatically received raffle tickets, but the Mega Prize Draw is open to everyone. Judging from previous years' results, members outside the UK stand a higher chance of winning the first prize – the highly acclaimed Leica 10 x 42 binoculars!

Apart from the Leica 10 x 42 binoculars, a £500 WildWings travel voucher could give you access to even the most exotic locations around the world, while a £250 Focalpoint voucher could provide you with the Christmas present you always wanted. Other prizes include *Handbook of the Birds of the World* Vols I and II (donated by NHBS), four copies of *The Hornbills*, four copies of *The Megapodes*, two copies of *The Penguins*, five copies of *Tits, Nuthatches and Treecreepers*, ten copies of *Photographic Guide to Birds of India and Nepal*, one copy of *Wild Indonesia*, one copy of *Wild Malaysia*, ten prizes of one roll of Fujichrome Sensia colour slide film (36 exp.) and ten prizes of one WildSounds CD sampler each with a £10 WildSounds voucher. The winners of the Mega Prize Draw will be drawn by Martin Woodcock at the AGM at London Zoo on Saturday 9th December 1995.

With the Club's Conservation Fund receiving more and more demands, we rely on our members' support to ensure that the Mega Prize Draw continues to provide the essential funding for it. Please show your support for conservation in Asia by buying or selling as many raffle tickets as you can.

## Sending post to the Club

Anyone writing to the Club is asked to allow at least a month for a reply. This applies in particular to those sending in a sales order or requesting information for a trip. The Club's post is received at The Lodge and circulated via the Secretary to the appropriate officers. This inevitably results in some delay in letters reaching their ultimate destinations. All Council members are volunteers who give as much time as their busy lives allow. Please give them as long as you can to deal with your order or enquiry.

## World-Wide Web pages

Following the publication of OBC Bulletin 21, a brand new edition of the OBC web pages is now available at:

<http://www.gold.net/users/dj10/obchome.html>

It features illustrated articles on:

- topical news from around the Oriental Region
- Kozlov's Bunting
- Night migration at Fraser's Hill, Malaysia
- Birdwatching in Danum Valley, Sabah
- latest Club News, OBC Conservation Fund news and requests for information.

## Two more Corporate Sponsors

Focalpoint, who have a long history of supporting the club, have consolidated the relationship by becoming our fifteenth Corporate Sponsor. Focalpoint can offer a wide range of optical equipment at very competitive prices to members, while its owners, Tony and Enid Murphy, are enthusiastic birdwatchers with a clear understanding of meeting the needs of our many globe-trotting members. To this end many members were able to sample the wide range of optical products available from Focalpoint at our recent Blakeney meeting, and it is hoped that Focalpoint will be a regular participant at this popular venue.

The club is also delighted to welcome Canon (UK) Limited as a Corporate Sponsor following their sponsorship of the special centre spread in this issue entitled *Oriental Showcase*. It is hoped that we will be able to develop this relationship and that Canon will continue to feature in subsequent issues of the Bulletin.

## More Business Supporters

Over the last year the club has been encouraged by the continued growth in Business Supporters which now stands at over thirty-five. Newcomers to this scheme are New Holland Publishers Ltd., Lynx Edicions, Swarovski Optik, Ecosurveys Ltd and Zeegrahm Expeditions. Each Business Supporter directly supports the costs of funding three honorary members, and as such they make a very valuable contribution to conservation in Asia.

## More good news from Fuji

As mentioned in the last issue we are able to continue offering photographers a free roll of the award-winning Fujichrome Sensia film thanks to the donation of more rolls of Fujichrome Sensia by Fuji. Any photographers wishing to take advantage of this special arrangement (whilst stocks last) should submit their material to the Bulletin editor.

In the last year Fujichrome Sensia has enjoyed unprecedented popularity, picking up two



important awards: 'People's Choice colour slide film' from *Practical Photography* and 'best slide film' from *Buying Cameras*.

## FUJICHROME Sensia 100

### New rep for Indonesia

After more than a decade of loyal service to the Club, Derek Holmes has decided to step down from being the Club's representative in Indonesia. Derek has represented the Club in Indonesia (recently jointly with Bas van Balen) since its inception, and has always been an enthusiastic supporter of the Club. With dozens of conservation grant applications from Indonesia over the years, Derek has certainly given more than his fair share of advice to the Club and we are extremely grateful for all his sound judgements during his long term as our representative.

We are most fortunate in finding a most able and personable successor to Derek. Rudyanto will now be joint representative with Bas van Balen. After just a few months Rudyanto has settled comfortably into his new role and is already advising the Club on conservation matters.

### Bulletin index

The Club has now prepared an index to the articles and features of Bulletins 1-21. Articles have been indexed in three ways: by author, by bird species and by country/region. A copy of the index is enclosed with this Bulletin. It is hoped that members will find it useful to access their Bulletins, as well as encouraging sales of back issues.

### 1995 Blakeney Meeting

It was good to see so many regulars at this ever-popular meeting, as well as a few new faces introducing themselves to their first OBC meeting at Blakeney. As usual, there were no major avian distractions outside the hall, and a large audience was treated to varied and interesting talks by Dave Farrow on a recent trip to Burma, Simon Cook on some of the rarer birds of India, and Seb Buckton on riverine birds in Nepal. Thanks are due to the three speakers, to Nona and Graham Finch for the tasty food, and to all those stalwart helpers who, as usual, did so much behind the scenes to make the meeting a success.

### 1995 Rutland Bird Fair

Three days of sweltering conditions in a very unforgiving marquee were extremely successful for the Club. Seventeen new members were recruited, £1,200 of merchandise was sold, and much interest in the Club was shown by the thousands of people attending the event. These occasions are hard work, and special thanks must go to those Council members who participated in this year's Fair, thus ensuring that the Club's message was successfully conveyed to as many people as possible.



*The OBC stand at the Rutland Bird Fair*

### Still some vacancies on Council!

As usual, the Club is looking for enthusiastic members with a bit of spare time who would like to join our team of dedicated Council members. Since the last appeal for help we have found a Meetings Officer and also an Assistant *Forktail* editor. However, although some new members have joined the editorial team we still need a Bulletin editor to take overall charge of the Bulletin and to guide the team. This is a vital and challenging role, but not too onerous given the support of an experienced editorial Committee.

We are still looking for a Distributions Officer to oversee the despatch of the Club's publications, and also for an Advertising Officer. Now that the Club is so successful in attracting so much advertising in the Bulletin, we feel it is worthwhile having someone whose specific role is to look after this important source of revenue. If you think you can sell oil to the arabs, do get in touch!

Thinking a little further ahead, we will be needing a new Sales Officer next year. This is another important role which generates considerable income for the Club. If you would like to help please get in touch now.



## Another £1,000 donation

Per Undeland has done it again! Having generously donated the magnificent sum of £1,000 to our Conservation Fund last year, Per has donated a further sum of £1000 to the fund. This is of course a tremendous boost to the Conservation Fund and the Club is truly indebted to Per for his outstanding generosity.

## Winning Knots

We are most grateful to The Knots, winners of the In Focus County Bird Race of 1994, who have generously donated £250 to the Club's Conservation Fund. The winning team comprised George Watola, Julian Branscombe, Danae Murfitt and Matt Stevens. Congratulations on your success and many thanks for your donation!

## OBC receives support from Lonely Planet and Geo Center

Members can only be impressed by the large quantities of prizes that have been available at recent events (Blakeney meeting, Rutland Bird Fair, etc.). In this context the Club would like to thank Lonely Planet for keeping us stocked with their very popular travel guides, and Geo Center for donating numerous copies of *Insight Guides: South-East Asia wildlife*. We are also grateful to New Holland Publishers for continuing to supply us with gifts for our various fundraising activities at meetings.



## Special thanks to the Government of India Tourist Office

The club is most appreciative of the support of the Government of India Tourist Office and their advertising agents, Butler Lutos Sutton Wilkinson, who provided much encouragement and ideas in the production of these India special publications. Members should note that a lot of helpful advice is available from the various branches of the India Tourist Office, and the London office (7 Cork Street, London W1X 2LN, Tel: 0171 734-6613) is distributing the Club's publication *Indian Birding Itineraries*.

## Help to OBC

OBC editorial Committee would like to thank Michelle Berry for help in the production of this bulletin. The committee would also like to thank Sarah Thomas, Dave Hatton and Richard Thomas for editorial support and Rob Still of Rubythroat Publications for his patience and help in getting this issue completed on time.

We are especially grateful to Carl D'Silva for his magnificent painting which graces the front cover and to the following members who gave their photographs for use in this Bulletin: Nigel Bean, Patrick Beirens, Kathleen and Mark Van Beirs, Simon Cook, John Flynn, Andrew Harrop, Henk Hendriks, Perwez Iqbal, Joakim Johansson, Tim Loseby, Ian Merrill, Pete Morris, Asad Rahmani, S. R. Rangaraj, Ravi Sankaran, Thakur Dalip Singh, Per Smitterberg and Paul Willoughby.

## Become OBC Bulletin editor !

OBC are looking for a new editor of the OBC Bulletin. This is an exciting opportunity to lead on producing one of the major magazines on Oriental birds and their conservation. We are looking for someone with preferably some editorial experience and knowledge of Oriental birds, but this is not vital. More important, perhaps, are excellent coordinating skills so that the expertise within the editorial Committee is used to its fullest potential. If you are interested please contact Colin Poole at the Club's address.

## Apologies

Due to an oversight we regret that Bulletin 21 was printed with out-of-date lists of Council Members, Representatives and Corporate Sponsors. In particular, we apologise to NHBS and Victor Emanuel Nature Tours whose names were omitted from the list of Corporate Sponsors.



## ASIAN TROPICAL ORNITHOLOGY: the AOU/OBC Symposium in Cincinnati

The annual AOU Stated Meeting was held this year in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was attended by some 650 ornithologists. The meeting was hosted by Bob Kennedy, OBC's representative in the USA, and a joint AOU/OBC symposium was devoted to Asian Tropical Ornithology. A fascinating and varied programme of talks had been put together by Douglas James and OBC is most grateful for his help in organising the Symposium.

OBC a high profile during the four-day meeting. The new display material summarising the Club's work, and in particular its commitment to conservation, was given prominence in the grand concourse of Cincinnati Museum (which had previously been the city's railway station!). Another display featured samples of the Club's merchandise, including our ever-popular T-shirts. Furthermore, every delegate received information about the Club and a sales leaflet with their information packs. A number of new members were recruited during the meeting, and the work of the Club is undoubtedly now better known amongst New World ornithologists.

The organisation of the meeting ran like clockwork. Everything had been planned in meticulous detail, and the smooth operation was a credit to all concerned. The organising committee was assisted throughout by an army of volunteer helpers. As far as the AOU/OBC symposium was concerned, special thanks should go to all the speakers, to Douglas James and Kannan for chairing it, to Bob Kennedy for overseeing the administration, and especially to Carole Stead and Jeff Brown who did so much to promote the Club at the meeting.

A brief résumé of the talks given at the symposium follows.

After an opening address given by Douglas James, Nigel Redman outlined the objectives and achievements of the OBC, highlighting in particular the work of the Conservation Fund and some of the many projects that have been funded over the years.

Richard C. Banks, President of the AOU, described a study of the Crested Argus *Rheinardia ocellata*, based on museum specimens, and highlighted important differences between the two widely separated populations of Malaysia and Vietnam. He also considered the possibility of a third, as yet unnamed, taxon in Vietnam.

Ragupathy Kannan, who gained his PhD for his work on the Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, is a past recipient of an OBC survey grant. He gave a fascinating and polished account on fruit availability and the conservation of the Great Hornbill in the Western Ghats of southern India. This was followed by Douglas James, who worked with Kannan on the Great Hornbill study, who examined the characteristics of nesting and foraging sites of the species. With the help of local people 24 nest sites and 20 foraging sites had been located in their study area.

Myanmar (Burma) has been largely off-limits to foreigners for many years, and in consequence its avifauna remains poorly known. Pamela Rasmussen of the Smithsonian Institution was lucky enough to visit the country in 1994-95 and presented some of the results of her fieldwork there. She has made a number of significant records for the country including several endemic and restricted-range species.

Nigel Collar, representing BirdLife International, examined the number and distribution of threatened birds in Asia. Using quantitative criteria such as decline rates, range sizes and population sizes, BirdLife has identified over 350 threatened species in Asia, with Indonesia (104), the Philippines (86), China (86), India (71) and Vietnam (45) holding the most. The next volume of the 'Red Data Book' will cover Asia.

After a break, John H. Rappole, who had also undertaken recent fieldwork in Myanmar, considered some questions raised as a result of his work there. Although the distribution of many species is reasonably well known in Myanmar, because of a number of early collections, the taxonomic status of some groups is not fully understood, as well as the apparent migratory status of species which had been presumed to be sedentary tropical residents.

Madhusudan Katti is a former winner of the Forktail-Leica Award (for a study in Arunachal Pradesh). He is now working for his PhD on wintering *Phylloscopus* warblers in southern India. In particular he is studying winter territoriality in the Green Leaf Warbler *P. nitidus* in the southern Western Ghats, and his talk considered such factors as body condition, territory acquisition and winter mortality.



The title of I. Lehr Brisbin's talk was undoubtedly the most thought-provoking: 'Is the Red Junglefowl one of Asia's most threatened birds?' In a highly entertaining and lively presentation, it was shown that free-ranging feral or domestic chickens freely hybridise with wild Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* and that this may have already compromised the genetic integrity of both wild and captive populations of the species. This problem could also compromise the interpretations of many published behavioural or genetic studies of 'wild' Red Junglefowl if the possibility of past hybridisation has not been considered.

Kenneth C. Parkes described the previously unknown juvenile plumage of the Spotted Wood Owl *Strix seloputo*, which differs strikingly from the adult. He also demonstrated that, although adults are only roughly similar, the juvenile Spotted Wood Owl bears a strong resemblance to that of the African Wood Owl *S. woodfordi*.

A. Townsend Peterson outlined the results of an avifaunal inventory of Mount Kitanglad, Mindanao, in the Philippines. Having demonstrated that all but one of Mindanao's endemic species are present on this massif (the same number as on Mount Apo), he argued that Kitanglad, with its more remote and

more extensive forests, may represent a better option for preserving Mindanao's endemic birds than Mount Apo.

Thomas Brooks considered whether the extent of deforestation can predict the number of threatened birds in insular South-East Asia. Mapping the percentage of deforestation and the number of endemic bird species in the Philippines and Indonesia, the number of species predicted to become globally extinct following deforestation of these islands was calculated. This was compared to the number of species considered threatened by BirdLife International and the results were found to be strikingly similar. This suggests that the size of the biodiversity crisis can be estimated from the extent of deforestation.

The final talk of the symposium was in fact extralimital! Helen F. James presented the first direct evidence of the diet of Hawaii's extinct flightless waterfowl, based on analysis of coprolites from one of these species. These birds are thought to have occupied the role of large herbivores, and it is likely that ferns were important in their diet.

Nigel Redman

# VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR BIRD SURVEY EXPEDITIONS TO SULAWESI

Just some of the 80 endemic birds you can expect to see in the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, home to well over 300 spectacular bird species:

Golden-Mantled Racquet-Tailed Parrot  
Vinous-Breasted Sparrowhawk  
Blue-Headed Wood Kingfisher  
Green Hanging Parrot  
Maroon-Chinned Fruit Dove

Fiery-Billed Malkoha  
Knobbed Hornbill  
Maleo  
Isabelline Waterhen  
Blue-Fronted Flycatcher

Sulawesi Serpent Eagle  
Ornate Lory  
Barred Honey Buzzard  
Minahassa Owl  
Greater Streaked Honeyeater

Expedition members will be taking part in a large international scientific survey of the birds of Sulawesi, many of which are on the brink of extinction. The data gathered will be used to establish new wildlife reserve areas and to develop management plans for the conservation of threatened species.

● Operation Wallacea is a not for profit project supported by the HongkongBank Care for Nature Trust Fund ●

Volunteers must meet all the costs of their expedition. Only 90 expedition places are available in 1995.

For further details contact: Operation Wallacea, c/o Ecosurveys Ltd, Priory Lodge, Hagnaby, Spilsby, Lincolnshire PE23 4BP Tel: 01790 763665 Fax: 01790 763417



OPERATION  
WALLACEA





# Conservation Fund

Compiled by Melanie Heath and Carol Inskipp

## Investigation of Protected Areas in Wuyuan



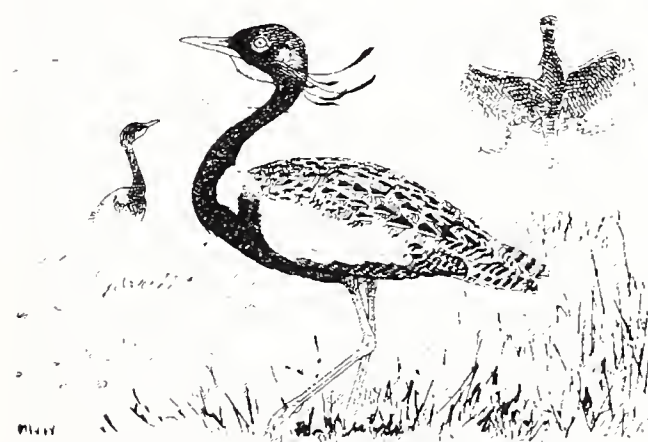
Yellow-throated Laughingthrush  
*Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*

An OBC Small Grant, together with the kind donation of \$500 each to OBC from the Zoological Society for the Conservation of Species and Populations (ZGAPS) and Stiftung Avifauna Protecta (SAP), has been awarded to this project. Zheng Pan-ji, Liu Zhi-yong and Hong Yuan-hua will study the birds in a series of 'mini-protected' areas in Wuyuan county, Jiangxi province, China. The team plans to carry out surveys of both bird and plant communities in 10-15 protected areas and using these data assess the function and effectiveness of the areas. Special attention will be given to the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi* (see Bull. OBC 19), to investigate its distribution and habitat selection within the province.

## Hornbills in Temenggor and Chenderoh Forest Reserves

A grant of £500, provided by Ornitholidays, has been awarded to Mike Chong to survey hornbills and other avifauna in the Temenggor and Chenderoh Forest Reserves in Peninsular Malaysia. The Temenggor Forest Reserve includes primary and secondary forest extending to the Thai border. Large numbers of hornbills (exceeding 1,000 birds) were sighted in the area in 1993/94 including Wreathed and possibly Plain-pouched Hornbill, a globally threatened species which has not been recorded definitely in Peninsular Malaysia. This more detailed survey will provide further information on the numbers and habitat preferences of the hornbills and other species as well as hopefully confirm the existence of Plain-pouched Hornbill in the reserve.

## Lesser Florican and restoration of grasslands



Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*  
by Martin Woodcock

Ravi Sankaran has been awarded a second grant of £500, donated by Per Undeland, to support his further work on the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*. Conservation action for the Lesser Florican has been initiated and substantial progress made (see pp 42-45 this issue) but is still in its infancy and requires considerable motivation and action. The objectives of this follow-up programme are to advocate the protection and sustainable management of targeted sites identified through earlier stages of the project. A core group of committed people, called the Florican Watch, will function at the district and village levels to make an inventory of protected grasslands in each district, identify and motivate an individual at the village level to protect the species around the village, and educate people on the conservation and sustainable use of grasslands. The project will organise workshops at the village level and provide educational materials.

## ECCA Environmental Resource Centre birdwatching facilities

A further grant of £500 has been awarded to Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness (ECCA) to strengthen the birdwatching facilities at the Environmental Resource Centre at



## Preliminary survey of the birds in the Li River Valley

Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* by  
Martin Woodcock



## Shifting cultivation and conservation of tropical forest bird communities in north-east India

Sipadol, Bhaktapur, in Nepal. In the past year, with the financial assistance of OBC and Murphy's Wildlife, ECCA has developed facilities there. In the coming year they will build on this work and further develop the facilities through increasing nests and feeding platforms, tree planting, producing educational materials, collecting books and articles and organising birdwatching camps.

### CONSERVATION FUND IN ACTION

We conducted this first preliminary survey of the birds in the Li River Valley, in Guilin, South China. The work took place from November 1993 to June 1995 with support from an OBC Small Grant.

The Li River Valley originates at Bajiaotian of Maoer mountain, the highest peak in southern China, and runs 160 km through Xingan county, Linchuan county, Guilin city, Yangshua county and Pinle county, covering a total area of about 570 km<sup>2</sup>. The survey covered Maoer, Yao, Xi, Yan and Haiyang mountains, Putao town, and the Yangshua and Guilin suburbs.

Over 250 bird species and subspecies (94 resident species, 37 summer migrants, 85 passage and 36 winter migrants) were recorded in the valley, representing 51 families, equal to over 50% of the species recorded in Guangxi province and about 20% of the bird species recorded in China.

Species of note include the globally threatened Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana*, Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*, Cabot's Tragopan *Tragopan caboti*, Elliot's Pheasant *Syrnaticus ellioti* and Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*. Near-threatened species include Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*, Temminck's Tragopan *Tragopan temminckii*, Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*, Brown-rumped Minivet *Pericrocotus cantonensis* and Red-tailed Laughingthrush *Garrulax milnei*.

*Liu Xiaohua, Xie Rongbin and Tang Chaoyu*

The impact of the traditional practice of shifting cultivation or *jhum* on evergreen and semi-evergreen forest bird communities was studied in Dampa Tiger Reserve in western Mizoram, north-east India. The north-eastern states of India is particularly rich in birds with over 700 species known to occur in the region. Currently, human land-use practices such as logging, shifting agriculture and developmental activities are believed to be causing much environmental degradation. Shifting agriculture is the predominant form of land use in the hills of north-east India, and at least 100 different indigenous tribes and over 620,000 families depend on it for their subsistence. *Jhum* typically creates a patchy mosaic of secondary successional vegetation ranging from recently abandoned weedy herbaceous fallows to dense bamboo forest, mixed tree and bamboo late successional forest, and remnants of primary forest.

Bird community changes through various stages of recovery were studied in the Dampa Tiger Reserve in 1994 and 1995, funded by an OBC Small Grant, donated by Per Undeland. Sites that were



*jhumed* 1, 5, 10, 25 and 100 years ago were compared with intact primary forest. Systematic and uniform line transect sampling showed that bird species richness, abundance and diversity increased from very low values in the 1-year-old fallow to maximum levels in 100-year-old and undisturbed forest, with intermediate values in the 5-25 year fallows (bamboo forests). Thus trends in bird communities were closely related to changes in the vegetation during succession.

Mature forests were found to be the main habitat for the forest specialists, rare birds and altitudinal migrants. Species of note are the globally threatened Blue-naped Pitta *Pitta nipalensis*, the near-threatened Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruficeps*, Yellow-vented Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus cantator* and Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*. Thirteen specialised open-country bird species and two species of long-distance migrants occurred mainly in *jhumed* areas. These were generally common and widespread species that are likely to persist in highly disturbed areas.

In terms of conservation of the forest birds in the region, mature forests are most important. The study shows that, under the 5-10 year *jhum* cycles that are prevalent in most parts of north-east India today, there will be substantial losses in bird and woody plant species richness, particularly if primary forests are not part of the *jhum* habitat matrix.

T. R. Shankar Raman

## Scaly-sided Merganser in Xiao Xingangling mountains, China

A study of the Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus*, part-funded by an OBC Small Grant, was carried out in August 1994 and May 1995 at Xiao Xingangling mountain, in north-east China. The Scaly-sided Merganser is a rare species with a restricted distribution in north-east Asia and is listed by BirdLife International as globally threatened. The total world breeding population is estimated at 1,200-1,500 pairs, 950 breeding in Far East Russia and 200-250 pairs in the forests of north-east China.

Xiao Xingangling mountain is one of the main forest areas in north-east China and is an important breeding area for the species. The area extends from 300-1,100 m altitude and the vegetation is dominated by mixed conifer and broadleaved forest. Some of the rivers in the forest are slow-flowing, with many meanders and a plentiful supply of fish, shrimps and crayfish providing excellent feeding habitat for the Scaly-sided Merganser. Large oaks *Quercus dentata* and poplars *Populus ussuriensis* on the river banks provide suitable nest holes for the merganser.

The Scaly-sided Merganser was frequently observed on the Tan Wang river and its tributaries, Cui Luan river, Nan Cha river and Yong Cui river 20 years ago. However, few birds were seen during this survey, indicating a dramatic reduction of the species in the area. According to observations made in June and August 1994, the species was seen only on the Yong Cui river, with an average population density of 0.3 nests per km, and in May 1995 only two pairs and one male were seen along 10 km of the same river. On the Tan Wang river Cui Luan river and Nan Cha river no birds were seen, although they were recorded here 20 years ago.



From these results it is estimated that there are 30-40 pairs in the Xiao Xingangling mountains. The main reasons for the decline are believed to be deforestation, illegal hunting and human disturbance mainly through the use of poison and explosives in fishing, resulting in a lack of food and nest holes for the species. In order to protect the Scaly-sided Merganser I have suggested to the local government the establishment of a nature reserve in Yong Cui river, a main breeding area of the species in the area. This is currently under consideration by the local authorities. The project also included a large component of environmental education work targeted at the local public.

*Zhao Zhengjie*

### **Behaviour and abundance of Green Peafowl in Baluran National Park, East Java, Indonesia**

A grant of £500 donated by WildWings part-funded my study of the behaviour of Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* in Baluran National Park in Java, Indonesia. The Green Peafowl has a large range extending from the hills south of the Brahmaputra River in north-east India to Peninsular Malaysia, with a disjunct population on Java. Once it was common in many parts of its range, but it is now believed to be extinct in India, Bangladesh, peninsular Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia, and it seems to have declined virtually everywhere else. Only fragmented populations remain and the species is considered globally threatened by BirdLife International. The main threats are habitat loss and hunting for food and the feather trade. Developing methods for surveying and estimating abundance of the species are a priority.

As with many tropical pheasants, attempts to estimate populations or study behaviour are hampered by the bird's extreme wariness of human observers. This study aimed to consider the feasibility of call counts for monitoring the peafowl's abundance in protected areas of Java. The general behaviour patterns of the peafowl were also to be described and quantified where possible as this information might be useful in managing peafowl. The area chosen for study was Baluran, as the largest number of Green Peafowl on Java occur there. In 1986 the population was estimated at 200 birds, although no systematic count had been made.

Fieldwork was carried out in February, March, from June to August and September to November 1993, and February, March and from June to August 1994. Diurnal and seasonal variations in calling were studied and distances between birds calling from roosting sites were estimated. Sight records of the sex and age of calling birds were made and group size and composition of flocks of birds were noted. Sonagrams of calling peafowl were analysed. A line transect was undertaken prior to the breeding season to investigate abundance and detectability of peafowl.

Peafowl were found in a wide range of habitats including open savannas, more closed woodland, shrubby monsoon forests and teak forests, although they were rarely heard in unbroken tracts of forest with dense undergrowth. In the dry season they visited coastal mangroves daily, perhaps for drinking or shade. Use of this habitat by peafowl has not been documented previously. The



study showed that calling behaviour of peafowl could be used to monitor their abundance, although its accuracy in estimating actual density is unknown. One particular type of call (wails) was given on most days, by adult males. Calling birds roost singly and the distance between adjacent birds was large enough to allow pinpointing of calls. Counting these calls was found to be a much more efficient and accurate method of estimating peafowl numbers than making line transects. A total of 400 birds was estimated at Baluran, twice the number guessed previously. The park staff were fully involved and trained to use the call counting method. This gives much hope for peafowl monitoring and studies in protected areas in East Java, one of the species's last strongholds.

*Mochamad Indrawan*

## Bird survey of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary

Survey work, assisted by a donation from Naturetrek, in the little known Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary and two nearby small forest reserves, Bherjan and Podumoni in Assam, India, has been completed. The study was carried out from July 1992 to May 1994 and was the first systematic survey of birds as well as other wildlife in the area. More than 250 bird species were recorded. The survey showed that Dibru-Saikhowa is an important sanctuary for a number of globally threatened species: Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis*, Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius*, Lesser Adjutant *L. javanicus*, Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca*, Baer's Pochard *A. baeri*, White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, Pallas's Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis*, Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*, Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea*, Blyth's Kingfisher *Alcedo hercules*, and Black-breasted Parrotbill *Paradoxornis flavirostris*. There are hardly any recent records of the last species anywhere in its range. Near-threatened species recorded included Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*, Lesser Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis*, Grey-headed Fish-eagle *I. ichthyaetus*, and Jerdon's Bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni*. The survey also extended the range of the Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus* and the Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*. Another notable record was that of a pair of Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone*, the first sighting of the species in north-east India for several decades. The Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae* and Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* were found to be resident at lower altitudes (c.100 m) than previously recorded.

The reserve faces problems of habitat destruction through tree-felling, encroachment by local villagers, grazing, fishing (including the use of poison), flooding, erosion and inadequate infrastructure. A core area of 190 km<sup>2</sup> where no human disturbance is allowed and relocation of forest villages are recommended. Copies of this report have been given to the Forest Department who are examining the recommendations for possible implementation (see also pp 49-51 this issue).

*Anwaruddin Choudhury*

Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis*  
by Martin Woodcock







# Around the Orient

Compiled by Colin Poole

## CHINA

### New records from Chinese-North Korean Border

The *Chinese Journal of Zoology* has reported a number of recent sightings from the lower Tumen River Valley. The most interesting record is of 'two or three' Steller's Sea-Eagles *Haliaeetus pelagicus* in both March 1988 and 1989, which are believed to be the first in China since the 1940s. Also reported are 60-70 White-tailed Eagles *H. albicilla* and about 150 Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis*.

### First records of Yellow-rumped Honeyguide

What appears to be the first Chinese record of Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus* has come from Yunnan province. The specimen was taken in October 1994, at an altitude of 2,600 m in the evergreen forest of Lushui County, western Yunnan near the Burmese border, and was sent to Yunnan's leading ornithologist, Yang Lan, who identified it as a male of the race *fulvus*. Intriguingly, this may not be China's first record as, in the *Chinese Journal of Zoology*, Yang also reports that the species has been photographed near Nylam in southern Tibet, but gives no further details.

### New wintering site for Oriental Stork

A major population of 900

Oriental Storks *Ciconia boyciana* has been discovered wintering at Shen Hu, a Yangtze Valley lake 48 km from Wuhan. The birds arrive in late October or early November and stay until March or early April, peaking between mid-December and early January when the water level is lowest.

However, although the Wuhan authorities designated this area a wildfowl reserve in 1994, the birds are far from safe. The author of the article in *Da Ziran (Nature)*, Hu Hongxing, who was the prime mover behind the establishment of the reserve, states that the wildlife is only protected on paper and that there is no money for wardens. There is strong pressure to hunt the storks because they supposedly threaten the local fishing industry. Hu reports that, according to incomplete data, 309 Oriental Storks were shot at Shen Hu between 1980 and 1988, and on a single day in January 1994 he saw hunters kill 100 Great Egrets *Casmerodius albus*. Increasing numbers of poachers are invading the area, especially at night, to hunt birds, fish illicitly and dig for lotus root.

The area was also found in January 1994 to be important for several other species including 42 Black Storks *Ciconia nigra*, 400 Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*, and 60 Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha*.

## HONG KONG

### Mai Po becomes Ramsar Site

Finally, after years of lobbying by WWF Hong Kong (see *Around the Orient*, Bull. OBC 21), on 4 September 1995 the Town Planning Board of the Hong Kong Government designated 1,500 ha of Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Also announced has been a proposal to spend HK\$423 million over five years for conservation management and the establishment of visitor centres. However, the many threats and pressures to the area have not automatically disappeared, as details of the implementation still depend on further studies. Of particular importance will be the future of the large area of privately owned fish ponds and wetlands lying outside the new site. The decision to give the go-ahead to the 'Sunnyville' project in the Mai Po outer buffer zone is currently being taken to the Court of Appeal by the Government's Town Planning Board.

## INDIA

### Gir National Park to be expanded

In a bid to save the last Asiatic Lions *Panthera leo persicus*, Gir National Park in Gujarat is to be expanded. Greater Gir sanctuary will include the surrounding areas of Barda,



Alek, Jasdan and the Girnar mountains. There are now only 304 lions left in Gir, and a further plan is to relocate some of them to parks in neighbouring Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

**New White-winged Duck sites in Arunchal Pradesh**

Surveys of the Mehao and Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuaries between 1990 and 1994 have confirmed both as new sites for White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*. From Mehao Lake in Mehao Sanctuary there have been two records, a pair in March 1993 and a single bird in January 1994, and in Pakhui Sanctuary there have been two confirmed records of two birds in both January 1991 and April 1992 on an unnamed lake 12km from the Kharat Beat Office. Local tribal people report seeing White-winged Ducks on this lake on many occasions.

**Pesticides threaten Corbett's Lesser Fish-Eagles**

Studies undertaken by Dr Rishad Naoroji have revealed that in the past four years not a single Lesser Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis* fledged successfully in Corbett National Park. The problem appears to be linked to pesticides. Analyses of egg shells have shown a high level of a DDT derivative and the post-mortem of a dead chick revealed it to have died from DDT poisoning. Recent studies have also linked the death of 18 Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone* at Bharatpur over the last three years - bringing the current population down to ten pairs - to a chemical, banned in the West, that is used to keep ants from the wheat crop.

**World Bank invests in Indian forests**

The World Bank is funding a US\$62 million project called 'Biodiversity Conservation through Ecodevelopment' in an attempt to reduce the human pressure on India's remaining forest. The Indian Institute of Public Administration has already identified seven sites for action - Palamau, Pench, Ranthambhore, Buxa, Periyar, Nagarahole (all Project Tiger reserves) and Gir Simlipal Tiger Reserve, which is expected to be included later. The project, which starts on 1 April 1996, aims to provide local people with sustainable, environmentally friendly ways of generating income, dissuading them from cutting wood for fuel or grazing cattle in the forests. However, not all Indian environmentalists support the project - some fear it could backfire and, by bringing in market forces and urbanisation, threaten the very areas it sets out to conserve.

**Greater Adjutant under threat in Assam**

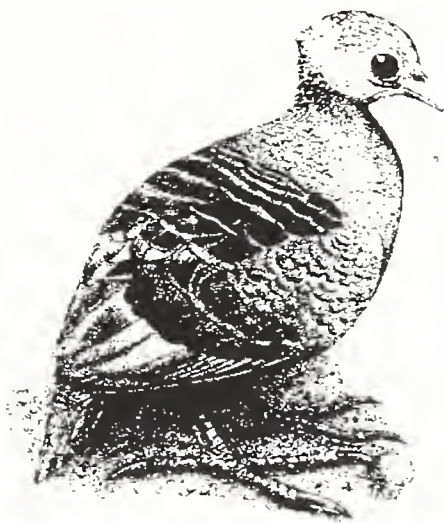
*Aaranyak*, the journal of the Aaranyak Nature Club in Assam, reports on the continued threats to Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* in Assam, one of the species' last strongholds. It states that in recent years Greater Adjutant has been recorded in twelve different districts of Assam - Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Mangoldai, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Lakhimpur. Unfortunately, most of the nesting colonies are outside the existing protected areas and the birds are reportedly threatened by the

killing of both adults and juveniles and by the unabated cutting of nesting trees.

**INDONESIA**

**New nesting ground for Moluccan Scrubfowl**

A new nesting ground for the globally threatened Moluccan Scrubfowl *Megapodius wallacei* has been discovered in northern Halmahera. In the peak nesting months between March and May, 500 and 1,000 birds are estimated to visit the 1.6 km sand bar every night, flying in from across the local bay. Of less than ten nesting sites known for the species, this is by far the largest. The eggs have been harvested traditionally by a small group of local people for nearly a century, and even though, at the peak period, 400 eggs per day can be harvested, current indications are that this level is sustainable and the birds are under no immediate threat.



Moluccan Scrubfowl *Megapodius wallacei* by Frank Rozendaal

**Invisible Rail no longer invisible**

Following surveys last year when BirdLife Indonesia staff thought they heard the calls of one of the Halmaheran endemics, Invisible Rail *Habroptila wallacii* (Around the Orient, Bull. OBC 21), further work this year, involving



interviewing local sago collectors, has been successful. In May 1995, after three months of survey work, BirdLife field officer Deminanus Bagali finally observed the species in a large sago swamp. This is the first conclusive field sighting of the species since 1948.

### Two Flycatchers rediscovered

Recent recipients of an OBC Conservation Fund grant, the joint UK-Indonesian project from York and Sam Ratulangi Universities for studies of the endemic birds of the Sangihe and Talaud islands off northern Sulawesi (*Bull. OBC* 21: 9), have made a remarkable discovery. On 5 September 1995 a single female Cerulean Paradise-flycatcher *Eutrichomyias rowleyi* was located in secondary scrub on a smallholding adjacent to a remnant patch of forest. The project members were guided to the area by a local farmer who reported seeing a medium-sized blue bird on his land. This Sangihe endemic, known only from the type specimen and one sighting in 1978, was widely feared extinct as several ornithologists had failed to find it in recent years.

The previous month, in August 1995, another flycatcher endemic to Sulawesi had also been rediscovered. Two British ornithologists working with the BirdLife Indonesia Programme on Gunung Lompobbatang, near the tip of the south-west peninsula of Sulawesi, refound Lompobbatang Flycatcher *Ficedula bonthaina*. Known only from this mountain, it had not been seen in the field since it was collected in 1931.

## MALAYSIA

### Taman Negara's rubbish problem

The increased tourist development in and around Taman Negara has created a rubbish disposal problem and, following a campaign by a national newspaper that publicised the bad state of the site, the existing Taman Negara rubbish dump adjacent to the Tembeling River just 3 km from the Taman Negara entrance is to be closed. The rubbish on the existing site is to be cleared up and a new site has been designated further from the river, but upstream of Taman Negara.

## NEPAL

### Plug Pulled on Arun III

In August 1995 the World Bank announced that it was withdrawing its funding for the US\$770 million Arun III hydro-electric power project in north-eastern Nepal, effectively cancelling the project.

Environmental grounds were cited as one of the reasons for the withdrawal. It represents a major success for Nepali NGOs who had long campaigned against the project on the grounds that it would have led to long-term dependency on foreign aid and that the road supplying the site would have caused extensive environmental damage (see *Around the Orient, Bulls OBC* 20 & 21); they favour smaller micro-power projects.



Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris* by Malcolm Ausden

## PAKISTAN

### Marbled Teal in southern Punjab

A survey of wetland sites in Muzaffargarh, southern Punjab, in summer 1994 revealed populations of Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris* at four sites in the Rangla complex. At the most important site, Rangla Dhanda, maximum of 35 birds was observed in September, but the survey failed to confirm evidence of breeding, indicating that they probably breed elsewhere in Muzaffargarh. A significant number of Ferruginous Pochards *Aythya nyroca*, were also observed during the survey and are presumed to breed in the area. The birds are threatened, however, as several local hunters admitted that they hunted Marbled Teal and as potential breeding areas are under increasing pressure from *Typha* cutting and overgrazing.

## PHILIPPINES

### Threatened hornbills of Panay

Surveys of Panay in summer 1994 revealed populations of two endemic hornbill species, the endangered Mindoro Hornbill *Penelopides mindorensis* and the critically threatened Writhed-billed Hornbill *Aceros waldeni*. A flock of 25-30 Writhed-billed Hornbills, seen on 21 July 1994 in a fruiting tree at 500 m, is reported to be the largest concentration of the species ever recorded. However, both species are under severe threat, as an ethno-interview survey revealed that local hunters shoot either species whenever they encounter them. In addition, two juvenile Writhed-billed



Hornbills were found for sale in Panay Market and are now in the custody of the College of Agriculture and Forestry.

### UK Taxidermy Seizure of Endangered Species

In August 1995 UK Customs and Police accompanied by officers from the RSPB and WWF made the largest ever raid on a UK taxidermist. Of the 500 specimens seized from a house in Newtown, Powys, the majority of which were birds, over 300 originated in the Philippines. Amongst specimens seized were several CITES Appendix I and II species, including birds of prey, parrots, owls and hornbills. The rarest were the skull of a Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi*, classified as critical, a skin of the endangered Palawan Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron emphanum* and a pair of near-threatened Rufous Hornbills *Buceros hydrocorax*. Investigations are still continuing, and the owner has been charged with illegally importing CITES Appendix birds from the Philippines.

## SINGAPORE

### Threats to Pulau Ubin

Pulau Ubin, the last extensive untouched area of Singapore, is coming under increasing threat from development despite it being designated by the Government as a 'Nature Area' and despite recommendations made by Goh Chok Tong in 1990 (now PM but then Deputy PM) that the island should be kept as it was. Current developments include loss of two portions of forest that make up part of Singapore's

only remaining Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* habitat. More importantly has been the clearance of two areas of mangrove totalling about 150 ha, the larger of the two for a prawn farm west of Sungai Besar. This cuts into Singapore's only remaining habitat for Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhyncha* and is counter to the urgings of the Nature Society (Singapore) to keep all the mangrove intact. Even if this development can be halted, the future does not look promising for Pulau Ubin. The Government's Master Plan for Redevelopment proposes that when the country's population reaches 4 million, Ubin is scheduled for an MRT line, a high density housing estate and two industrial estates.

## SRI LANKA

### Ceylon Bush-Warbler Localities

One of what used to be the best localities in Sri Lanka for the near-threatened endemic Ceylon Bush-Warbler *Bradypterus palliseri*, Galway's Land Sanctuary, a small area of hill-forest near Nuwara Eliya, is reported to be no longer a good site for the species. Although it is still a sanctuary, there is also now a military base on the site and some parts are therefore inaccessible. Birders are now forbidden to walk into the interior and must stay on the main gravel road that runs through the sanctuary. Ceylon Bush-Warblers are now seen only occasionally as there is too much human activity and as part of the undergrowth favoured by the birds appears to have been cleared. Firewood cutters are encroaching on the

sanctuary as there are too few staff to guard the whole area. Local ornithologists now consider Horton Plains a better area for seeing Ceylon Bush-Warbler.

### Annaivilundawa to become a Bird Sanctuary

In 1994, an OBC small grant funded an avifaunal survey of the Annaivilundawa tanks, 60km north of Colombo. The survey recorded 143 species including two endemics, Ceylon Junglefowl *Gallus lafayetii* and Ceylon Grey-Hornbill *Ocyroceros gingalensis* (see *Bull. OBC* 21:13-14.) but the area was found to be under long-term threat from a plan to increase paddy cultivation. On the basis of the survey's report, the Ceylon Bird Club recommended that the tanks be declared a bird sanctuary, and, in May 1995, this recommendation was granted in principle by the Department of Wildlife Conservation in Sri Lanka.

## THAILAND

### Further threats to Gurney's Pitta

Despite land claims in the Bang Khram National Reserve Forest being illegal, there is further evidence that, aided by corruption, such claims are continuing to threaten the remaining habitat of the last-known population of Gurney's Pitta *Pitta pitta gurneyi* (see *Bull. OBC* 15: 29-32). In May 1995, field-workers found an area of 0.5 km<sup>2</sup> of forest, which had in previous years supported one or two pairs of Gurney's Pitta, cut through with regular straight transects, marking out the area as a land claim. It



Gurney's Pitta  
Pitta gurneyi  
by  
Craig  
Robson

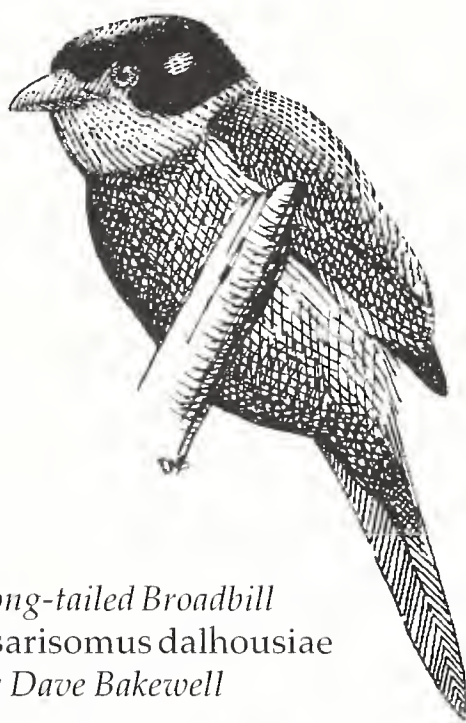


transpired that this was part of a 2,000 rai (c.3 km<sup>2</sup>) plot of land that had been bought by a Nai Uan ('Mr Fatty') from Hat Yai. Thankfully though, this latest illegal claim has probably been discovered in time and it is hoped that, with the cooperation of a conservation-minded village headman, this small area of forest can be saved.

#### Wildlife Trade Continues in Bangkok

Since Thailand signed CITES in 1992, the volume of international traffic in endangered species being traded through the

country has decreased dramatically. However, at the same time, it appears that, with increasing affluence, the domestic demand for wildlife trade is increasing. In April 1995, the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand reports that one pet shop near Chatuchak Market held 50 Silver-breasted Broadbills *Serilophus lunatus*, 'lots of' Long-tailed Broadbills *Psarisomus dalhousiae* and 'a cage full' of Banded



Long-tailed Broadbill  
*Psarisomus dalhousiae*  
by Dave Bakewell

Kingfishers *Lacedo pulchella*. Although the shop was reported to the Royal Forest Department (RFD) nothing was done. With only two officers responsible for policing wildlife trade in Bangkok, the RFD is, effectively, powerless.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SOURCES

*About Life* (WWF Hong Kong), *Aaranyak*, *BBC Wildlife*, *Bird Conservation Society of Thailand Bulletin*, *BirdLife Indonesia* Programme, *Ceylon Bird Club*, *Mike Chong*, *Delmege Forsyth Tours (Pvt) Ltd*, *EEP Hornbill Taxon Advisory Group Newsletter*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Guardian*, *Megapode Newsletter*, *The Nation*, *Naturewatch* (Nature Society Singapore), *New Straits Times*, *Michael Rank*, *The Star* (Kuala Lumpur), *Brian Sykes*, *Threatened Waterfowl Research Group Newsletter*, *The Tribune*, *Per Undeland*, *Deepal Warakagoda*.

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# Drongos of the Indian subcontinent

This text and illustrations on the identification of drongos have been prepared for a forthcoming *Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian subcontinent* to be published by A & C Black, and are not yet finalised. The authors and artist welcome any comments.

The drongos Dicruridae occur from Africa east to Papua New Guinea and as far north as Siberia, but their main range lies in South Asia. Drongos can be confusing birds to identify in the field, notably separating the species pairs Black and Crow-billed, Black and Ashy, and Lesser Racket-tailed and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos. The *lophorhinus* race of Greater Racket-tailed is of particular interest, and may prove to be a separate species, since it lacks the 'rackets' characteristic of other races of this species. Formerly it was thought to be endemic to Sri Lanka, but there are now records from Goa where the nominate race, which has typical 'rackets', also occurs.

In general appearance the South Asian species are similar: they are medium-sized with characteristic black and often glossy plumage; long, often deeply forked, tails; and a very upright stance when perched. Drongos also resemble each other in their behaviour, being mainly arboreal and insectivorous, catching larger winged insects by aerial sallies from a perch like flycatchers. When in pursuit of insects drongos are very agile, twisting and turning adroitly in mid-air. Although usually solitary, they gather in flocks when at good food sources, such as flowering trees or when chasing fleeing insects in the smoke of forest fires. Their direct flight is swift, strong and undulating. Vocalisations are not very helpful in separating drongos as their calls are usually difficult to distinguish. Typically they are rather noisy and have a varied repertoire of harsh calls and pleasant whistles; some species are good mimics. Although Black Drongo is usually found in open country, the other drongos all frequent forests or wooded habitats.

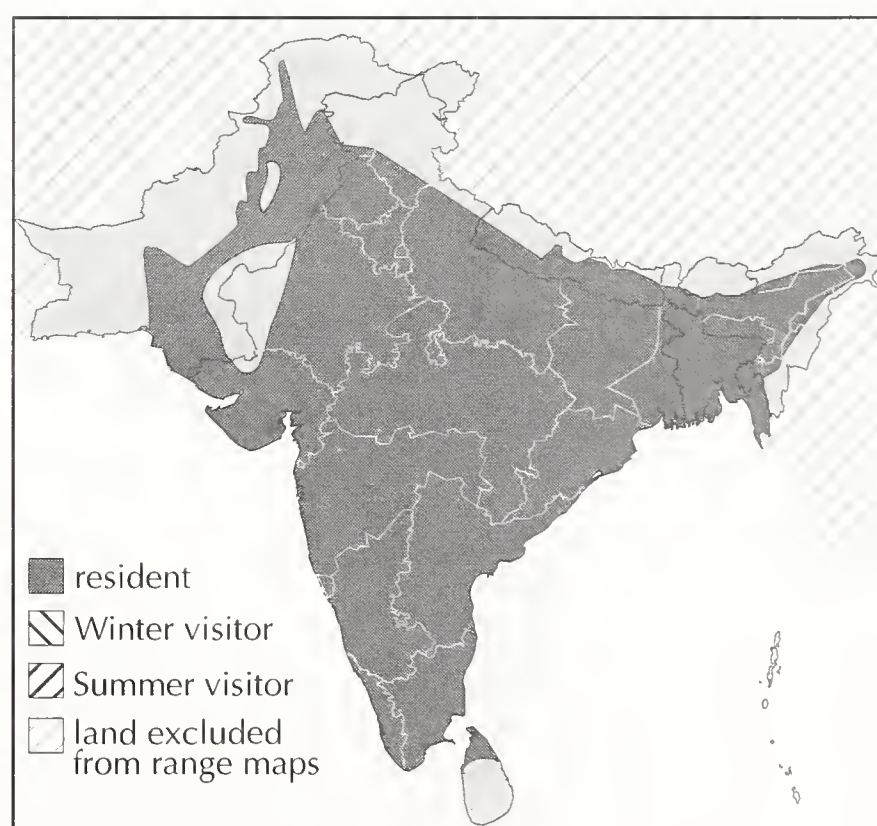
## BLACK DRONGO

### *Dicrurus macrocercus*

**Identification** 28 cm. **Adult** is glossy blue-black, with deeply forked tail (although tail fork can be

lost during moult); usually shows white rictal spot which is not shown by other species. From Ashy Drongo, which can also appear very dark and glossy, by glossy blue-black throat and breast, merging into black of rest of underparts. From White-bellied Drongo by black belly, flanks and vent. For differences from Crow-billed Drongo see account for that species. **First-winter** birds have diffuse whitish fringes to dull black breast, belly and undertail- and uppertail-coverts. Upperparts and breast have a glossy sheen. They are similar to first-winter Ashy but underparts are blacker with more prominent and extensive whitish fringes (which can merge to form whitish patches in centre of belly). **Juvenile** has uniform dark brown upperparts and underparts, lacking glossy sheen; and may show white fringes to secondaries. Tail is short, with only a slight fork, when young.

**Distribution and status** Throughout much of the subcontinent; subject to local and altitudinal movements. **Pakistan:** abundant; a summer visitor to the far north, resident and winter visitor further south. **Nepal:** abundant and widespread from the





lowlands up to at least 1,525 m all year, occasionally summers up to 2,000 m. **India:** common and widespread in the plains and hills; up to 1,500 m in the Himalayas where it is mainly a summer visitor. **Bhutan:** uncommon. **Bangladesh:** abundant throughout. **Sri Lanka:** common in the dry north and north-west coastal belt, occasionally visits inland and further south.

## ASHY DRONGO

### *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

**Identification** 29 cm. **Adult** from Black Drongo by dark grey (rather than black) underparts (with difference in coloration especially apparent on throat, breast and flanks). Has blue-grey gloss on sides of neck and breast, but gloss is not as extensive as in Black. Upperparts are slate-grey with strong blue-grey gloss, although can appear almost black and much as Black Drongo. Often appears slimmer with longer, more deeply forked tail (although tail fork can be lost during moult), and has more striking red iris. Does not show white rictal spot which is often apparent at close range in Black Drongo. From White-bellied Drongo by uniform grey underparts (although care is needed in Sri Lanka where one race of that species has all-dark belly). **First-winter** birds have uniform brownish-grey underparts, with diffuse (and typically very indistinct) whitish fringes to belly and whitish tips to undertail-coverts. From first-winter Black by duller and greyer underparts, and much less prominent and extensive fringes to underparts. Appears not to show distinct pale fringes to uppertail-coverts as in first-winter Black. Has blue-grey gloss to upperparts. From first-

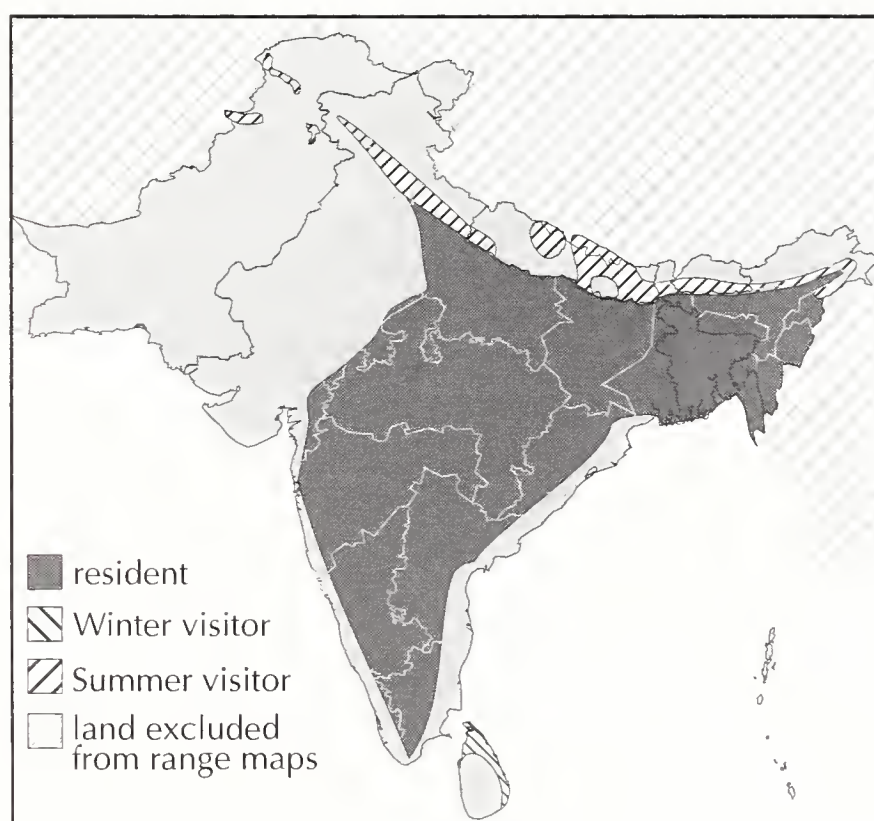
winter White-bellied by brownish-grey underparts (lacking well-defined white belly and flanks always shown by that species except in Sri Lanka). **Juvenile** has shorter tail when young (with only a shallow fork), and uniform brownish-black upperparts and underparts which lack a glossy sheen. Probably not safely distinguishable in the field from juvenile Black. **Racial variation:** birds breeding in the e. Himalayas (*D. l. hopwoodi*), are paler and greyer than those breeding in the w. Himalayas (*D. l. longicaudatus*), and are more easily separable from Black Drongo; *D. l. salangensis*, which is much paler grey and has white lores and cheeks, has been recorded in Nagaland and possibly the Andamans. This last form has grey coverts and secondaries which contrast with black alula and primaries, and often has a blackish forehead.

**Distribution and status** Breeds in the Himalayas from north Pakistan east to Arunachal Pradesh and the north-east India hills. Winters in the plains from east Punjab and south Gujarat east to Manipur, south through the peninsula and Sri Lanka. **Pakistan:** frequent summer visitor to the more wooded Himalayan valleys, 900-2,500 m. **Nepal:** common; mainly resident, summers 1,220-2,745 m, winters 1,065-1,525 m; also a locally common resident in the lowlands. **India:** locally common; summers in the Himalayas from the foothills up to 3,000 m; winters in the plains. **Bhutan:** common resident, 250-3,000 m. **Bangladesh:** uncommon winter visitor throughout. **Sri Lanka:** winter visitor to the lowlands, more frequent in the east dry zone.

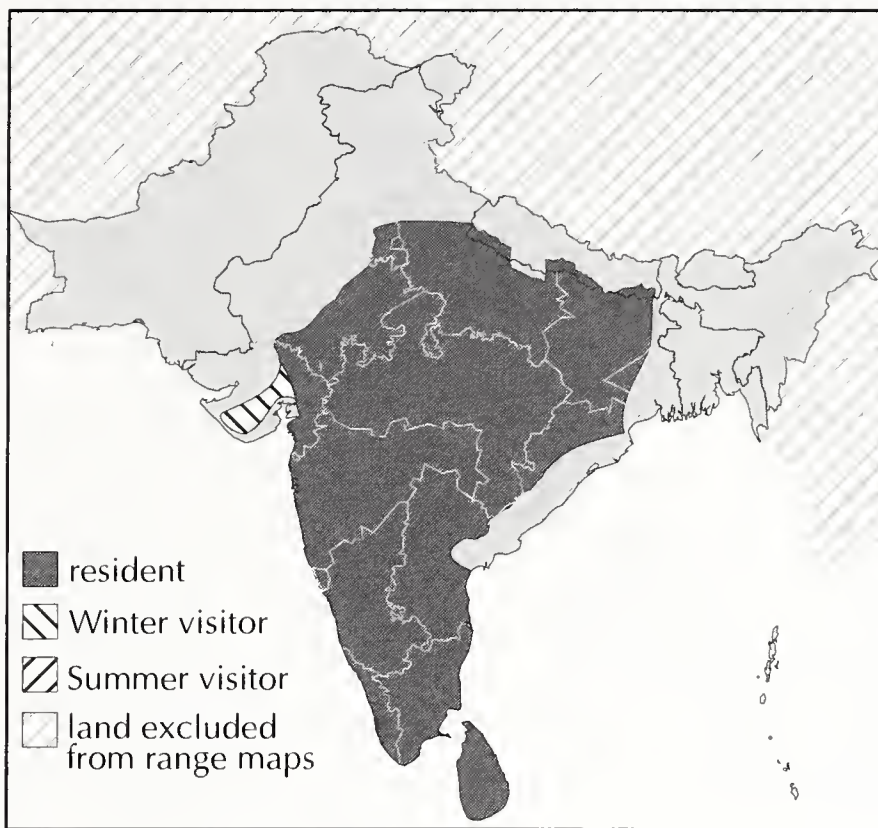
## WHITE-BELLIED DRONGO

### *Dicrurus caerulescens*

**Identification** 24 cm. **Adult** from Black and Ashy Drongos by brownish-grey throat and breast (lacking glossy sheen), and white belly and vent. Some birds have blue-grey cast to breast. Tail is shorter and fork is typically shallower than in those two species. Upperparts are glossy slate-grey, much as Ashy (and therefore less black than Black Drongo). Care is needed in Sri Lanka where one race has all-dark belly. **First-winter** is similar to adult, but throat and breast are browner and divide between breast and white belly is less clearly defined. **Juvenile** as first-winter but upperparts are dark brown, lacking slate-grey gloss. **Racial variation:** two races occurring in Sri Lanka have less white on underparts than the nominate race of the peninsula; *D. c. leucopygialis*,







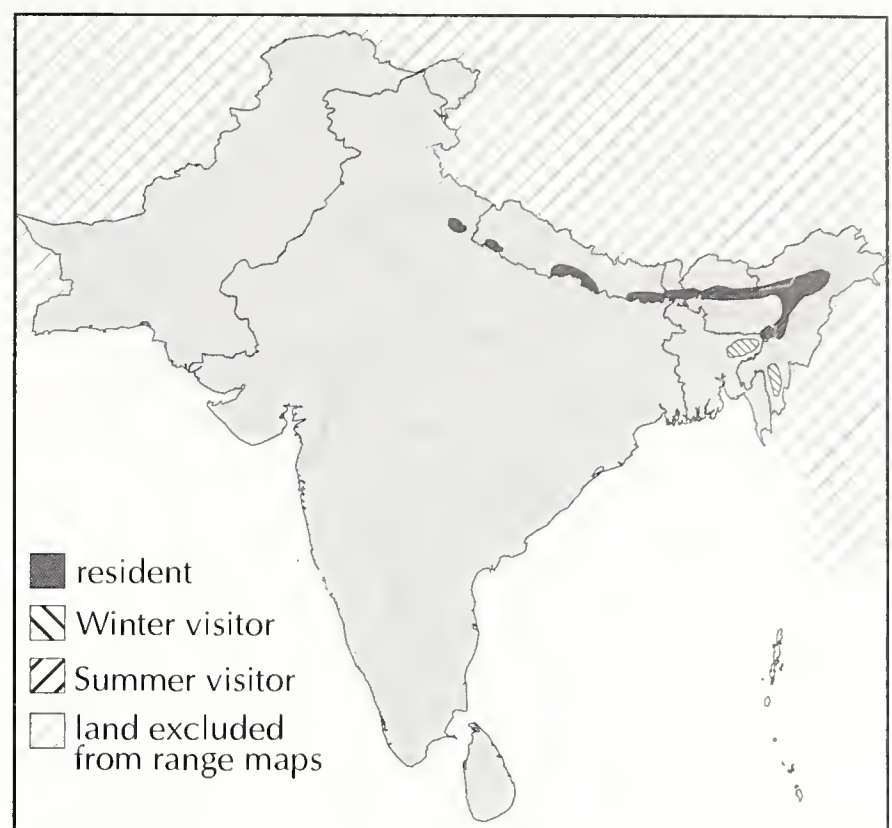
of the wet zone, has uniform dark grey underparts with slight gloss to breast, and has white restricted to vent and undertail-coverts. Easily confusable with Ashy Drongo (especially first-winter birds). Shorter tail with shallower fork; blacker throat and breast (of adults), and all-white undertail coverts are helpful features for distinguishing White-bellied.

**Distribution and status** Resident. South Haryana and south Gujarat east through south Nepal to West Bengal, south through the peninsula and Sri Lanka. Subject to local movements. **Nepal:** locally common from the lowlands up to 300 m. **India:** widespread, but generally uncommon in the plains and foothills up to 1,800 m, up to 1,500 m in the south. **Sri Lanka:** common in the lowlands and adjacent lower hills.

## CROW-BILLED DRONGO

### *Dicrurus annectans*

**Identification** 28 cm. Most likely to be confused with Black Drongo, although that species is not found in dense forest. **Adult** from Black Drongo by much stouter bill; more extensive area of rictal bristles (resulting in tufted forehead not unlike Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo); and shorter, broader tail which is widely splayed but not deeply forked (with outer tail feathers more noticeably curving outwards). **First-winter** birds have white spotting to breast, belly, flanks and undertail-coverts, and are thus quite different from other first-winter drongos (except Greater Racket-tailed). Has less pronounced tail fork than adult. **Juvenile** has uniform brownish-black upperparts and



underparts which lack glossy sheen. Spotted feathers of first-winter plumage quickly appear.

**Distribution and status** Summer visitor or resident in the Himalayan foothills from north-west Uttar Pradesh east to Arunachal Pradesh and hills of north-east India. Winters in Bangladesh and north-east India; rest of winter range is unknown. Status is uncertain because of confusion with Black Drongo. Subject to seasonal movements. **Nepal:** probably a local and uncommon summer visitor from the lowlands up to 250 m. **India:** recorded in the foothills up to 600 m, occasionally higher, and in adjacent plains. **Bhutan:** fairly common summer visitor, 300-1,450 m. **Bangladesh:** local winter visitor.

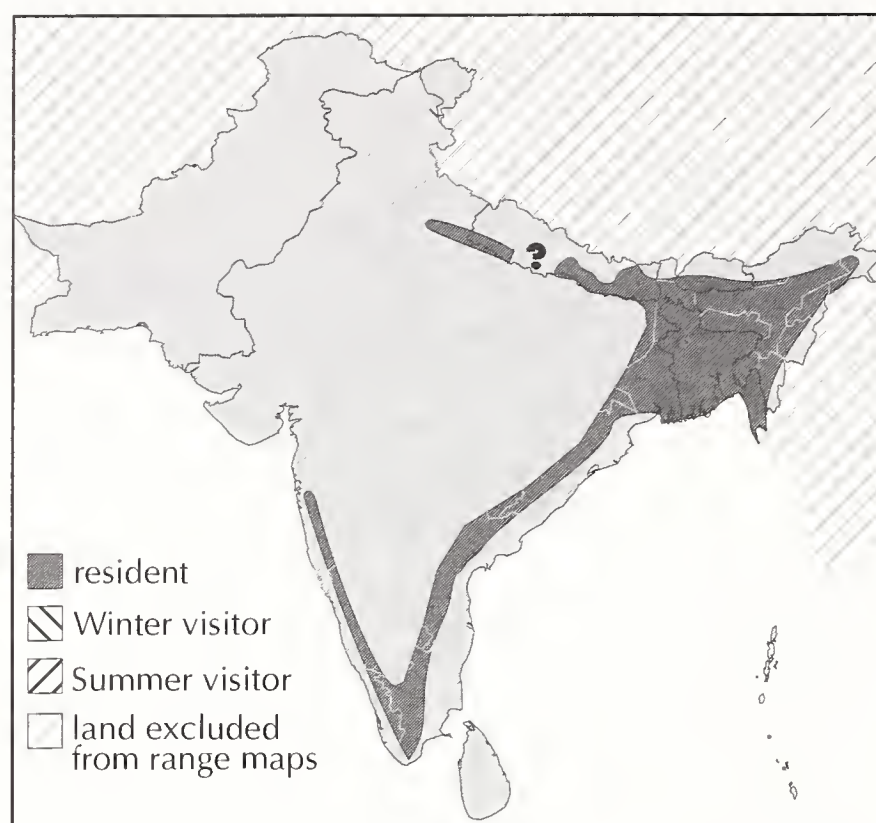
## BRONZED DRONGO

### *Dicrurus aeneus*

**Identification** 24 cm. A small, hyperactive, forest-dwelling drongo. **Adult** is black and strongly glossed with metallic blue-green. From Black Drongo by smaller size; spangled appearance (especially to crown, nape, mantle and breast); flatter bill; and shorter, less deeply forked tail (which can be almost square-ended in moulting or juvenile birds). **Juvenile** Underparts are uniform sooty brown and initially lack spangling, and upperparts are duller and less heavily spangled compared with adult.

**Distribution and status** Resident in the Himalayan foothills from north-west Uttar Pradesh east to Arunachal Pradesh, south through the hills of north-east India and Bangladesh, and Eastern and Western Ghats. Subject to seasonal



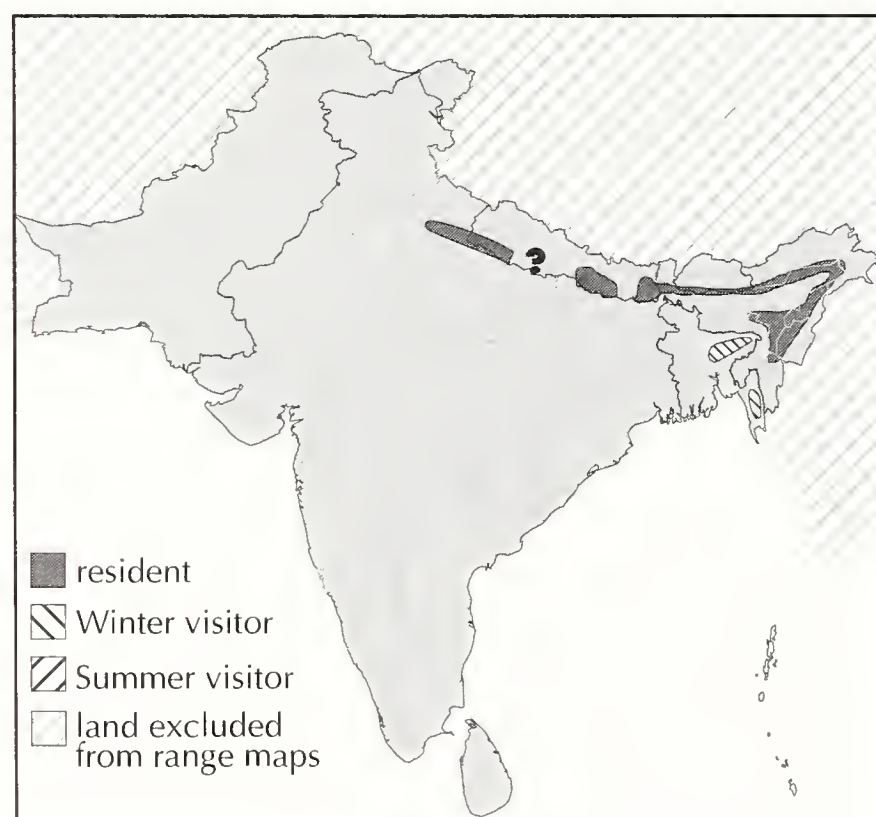


movements. **Nepal:** fairly common, mainly summers up to 1,600 m, occasionally to 2,000 m, usually winters below 1,220 m. **India:** occurs up to 2,000 m in summer; fairly common in the Himalayas, common in the Western Ghats. **Bhutan:** fairly common, 250-1,500 m. **Bangladesh:** locally common.

## LESSER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO

### *Dicrurus remifer*

**Identification** 25 cm. **Adult** from Greater Racket-tailed by smaller size; smaller bill; tufted forehead (giving rise to rectangular head-shape); square-ended tail, and smaller, flattened, oval rackets (which are fully webbed on both sides of shaft). Tail streamers and rackets can be sometimes



missing or broken. **Juvenile** lacks rackets and is less heavily spangled on upperparts and underparts than adult. Tail can appear very slightly forked and is best told from immature Greater Racket-tailed by smaller size; tufted forehead (and absence of any form of crest); and smaller bill.

**Distribution and status** Resident in the Himalayan foothills from north-west Uttar Pradesh east to Arunachal Pradesh and hills of north-east India. Winters in Bangladesh. **Nepal:** local, occasionally recorded 915-1,800 m (-2,440 m); possibly withdraws from higher levels in winter. **India:** locally fairly common from the foothills up to 2,000 m. **Bhutan:** fairly common from the foothills up to 1,675 m. **Bangladesh:** local winter visitor.

## HAIR-CRESTED DRONGO

### *Dicrurus hottentottus*

**Identification** 32 cm. A large, stocky, forest-dwelling drongo. **Adult** from other drongos by hair-like crest; broad tail, with shallow, outward- and upward-twisted fork (appearing almost square-ended in field); long, down-curved bill;

### Plate Captions

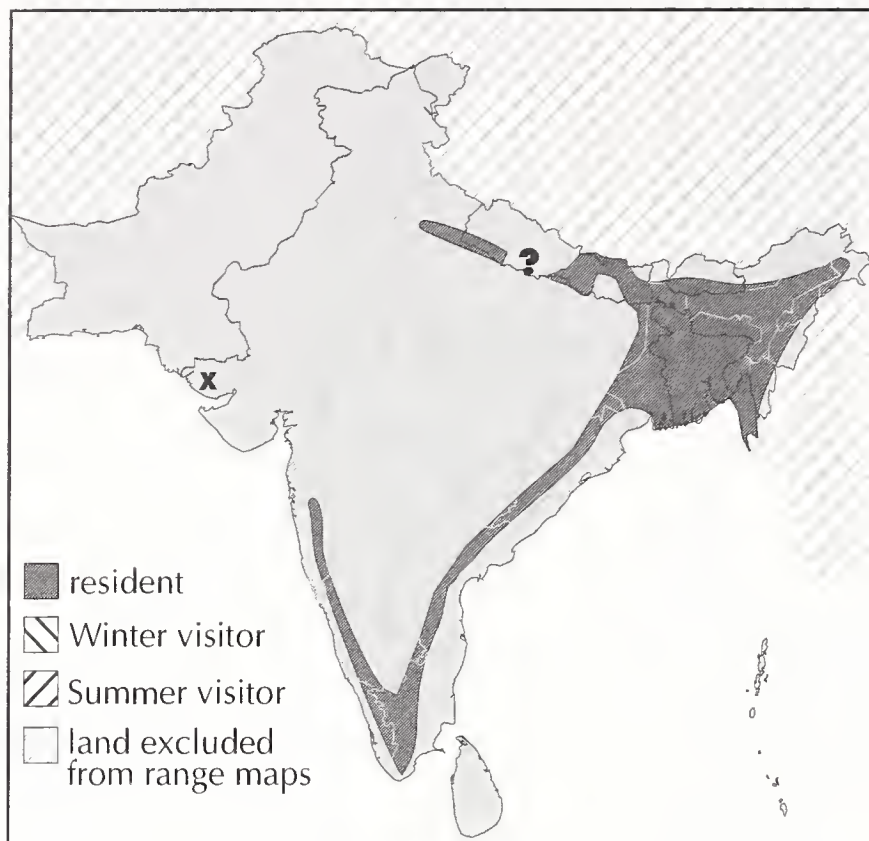
1. Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*  
1a. Juv. 1b. First-winter 1c. Adult *D. m. albirictus*
2. Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*  
2a. First-winter 2b. Adult *D. m. longicaudatus*  
2c. *D. l. hopwoodi* 2d. *D. l. salangensis*
3. White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens*  
3a. First-winter 3b. Adult *D. c. caerulescens* 3c. Adult *D. c. leucopygialis*
4. Crow-billed Drongo *Dicrurus annectans*  
4a. First-winter. 4b. Adult
5. Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*  
5a. First-winter 5b. Adult *D. a. aeneus*
6. Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer*  
6a. First-winter 6b. Adult *D. r. rectirostris*
7. Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*  
7a. First-winter 7b. Adult *D. h. hottentottus*
8. Andaman Drongo *Dicrurus andamanensis*  
8. Adult *D. a. andamanensis*
9. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*  
9a. First-winter 9b. Adult *D. p. ceylonicus* 9c. Adult *D. p. grandis*





C.D'S





metallic spangling to crown, sides of neck, throat and breast, and highly glossed wings and tail. **Juvenile** is browner and lacks spangling of adult; lacks crest; and has square-ended tail with less pronounced upward twist to outer tail feathers.

**Distribution and status** Resident in the Himalayan foothills from north-west Uttar Pradesh east to Arunachal Pradesh, south through the hills of north-east India and Bangladesh, and Eastern and Western Ghats north to north Maharashtra and south to south Kerala. (-4,115 m). Subject to seasonal movements depending on nectar supplies. **Nepal:** fairly common from the lowlands up to 1,050 m, uncommon to 1,525 m (-4,115 m). **India:** locally common in the Himalayas, uncommon in the Western Ghats; from the plains up to 1,400 m, occasionally to 2,000 m. **Bhutan:** fairly common, 250-1,280 m. **Bangladesh:** locally common from the plains up to 1,400 m, occasionally to 2,000 m.

## ANDAMAN DRONGO

### *Dicrurus andamanensis*

**Identification** 32 cm. **Adult** superficially resembles Black Drongo, being all-black with blue-black gloss. Has much larger and longer bill than that species, and long, broad tail with shallow fork and outer tail feathers twisting inwards at tip. Has several hair-like filaments resulting in a crest reminiscent of (although less distinct than) Hair-crested Drongo. **Juvenile** is browner and less-glossed, and has square-ended tail when very young.

**Distribution and status** Occurs only in the Andaman Islands and the Coco Islands



(Myanmar). Resident on the Andaman Is (Little and south Andaman Is), India.

## GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO

### *Dicrurus paradiseus*

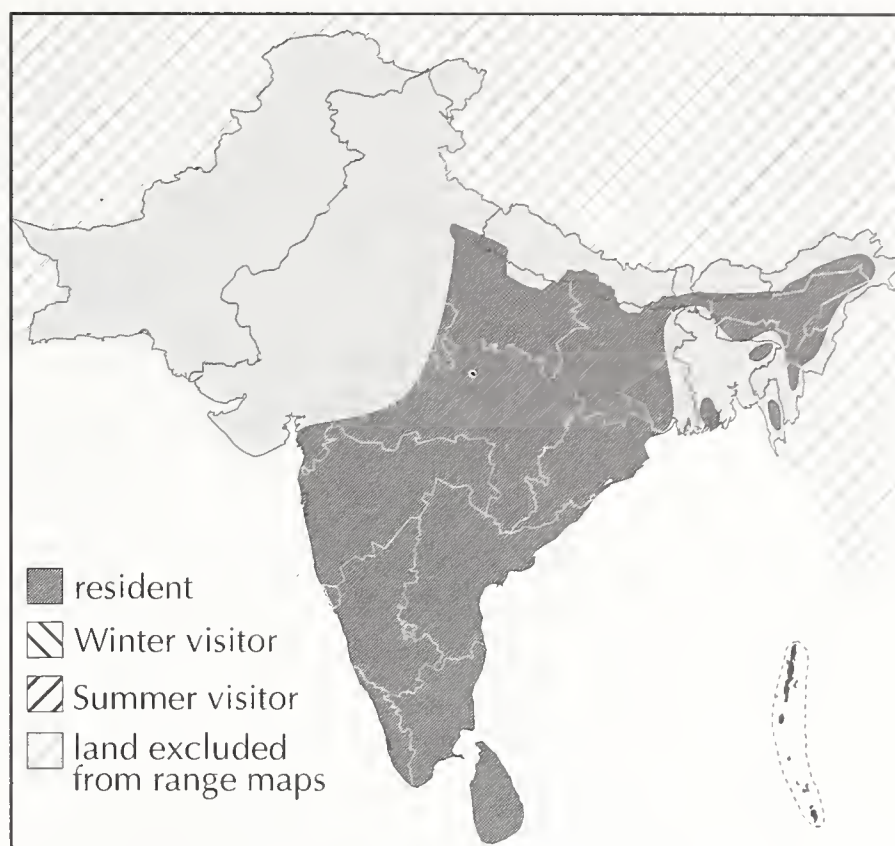
**Identification** 32 cm. A forest-dwelling drongo, which is pendant-tailed in most races. **Adult** from Lesser Racket-tailed (where ranges overlap) by larger size and less tidy appearance; larger bill; crested head; forked tail, and larger, longer, twisted tail-rackets (which are only webbed on one side of shaft). Tail streamers and rackets can sometimes be missing or broken, and tail can appear almost square-ended when in moult (or in juvenile plumage). **Juvenile** initially lacks rackets; is less heavily glossed than adult, and has much reduced crest. Has white fringes to belly and vent in **first-winter** plumage. Best told from Lesser Racket-tailed by larger size; presence of some form of crest; longer and heavier bill; more pronounced fork to tail; and, if present, white fringes to



underparts. **Racial variation:** six races are recognised from the subcontinent which vary in size, length of tail streamers, and size of crest. Races in southern India, Sri Lanka, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands have much reduced or almost absent frontal crest and can look very like Lesser Racket-tailed. *D. p. lophorhinus* of the wet zone in Sri Lanka and near Goa has a long and deeply forked tail, slightly twisted at the corners, and lacks the terminal rackets of other subspecies.

**Distribution and status** Resident from south Gujarat and north-east Uttar Pradesh east through south Nepal to north-east India and Bangladesh and south through the subcontinent. Subject to seasonal wanderings. **Nepal:** locally common, mainly below 150 m, uncommon up to 365 m (-1,370 m). **India:** widespread and locally common from the plains up to 1500 m. **Bhutan:** uncommon, 250-1,000 m. **Bangladesh:** local. **Sri Lanka:** lowlands and adjacent lower hills; common in wet zone, infrequent in dry zone.

\* Any comments on this article would be gratefully received and used for the forthcoming field guide in preparation, and they should be sent to the senior author.



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**Plate Captions**

1. Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana*; 2. Intermediate Parakeet *Psittacula intermedia*,  
2a. Female 2b. Male; 3. Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

Plate by Carl D'Silva



# Little-known Oriental bird

## Intermediate Parakeet *Psittacula intermedia*



The Intermediate Parakeet is one of India’s most intriguing birds. It is known only from a small number of skins and captive individuals. Its status/distribution and behaviour in the wild are a mystery.

A history of controversy surrounds the status of the Intermediate Parakeet *Psittacula intermedia*. Some ornithologists believe it is a species, whilst others think it is a hybrid between Slaty-headed Parakeet *P. himalayana* and Plum-headed Parakeet *P. cyanocephala*. Although still not conclusively proven, current evidence supports the former view.

Rothschild<sup>7</sup> first described the Intermediate Parakeet in 1895 in the following way:

- ‘*Palaeornis intermedia* sp. nov.
- Under mandible* orange-yellow.
- Maxilla* orange-crimson, with yellow tip.
- Forehead* and orbital region rufous plum-purple; rest of head and cheeks slaty purple, not quite as dull as in *P. rosa* [= *Psittacula roseata*]. Separating the head-colour from the back is a narrow black collar joined to broad black mandibular stripes. This black collar is followed by an ill-defined band of bright verdigris green. Back and scapulars oil-green; rump, wing, and upper tail-

- coverts more grass-green, with a slight bluish tinge; a large maroon spot on the middle wing-coverts. Central tail-feathers missing; rest of tail as in *P. schisticeps* [= *Psittacula himalayana*], but outer webs more blue.
- Whole *undersurface* yellowish apple-green.
- Under wing-coverts* bright glaucous green; wings like those of the three allied species.
- Wing, 6 inches; bill, 0.8.
- Hab.* India. The single skin now before me is of the so-called Bombay preparation, and therefore most likely came from the Western Provinces [= western Himalayas]. With it came two skins of *P. schisticeps*.
- This species is somewhat intermediate between *Palaeornis schisticeps* and *P. cyanocephala* in size and coloration, but is nearer *P. schisticeps*, with which it agrees in colour of the *under mandible*, which is black in *P. cyanocephala* and *P. rosa*.’
- The differences between this species and Plum-headed and Slaty-headed Parakeets are best summarized in tabular form (Table 1).

|                             | Plum-headed                                     | Slaty-headed                                                     | Intermediate                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bill                        | Upper mandible yellowish, lower mandible black. | Upper mandible red with yellowish tip, lower mandible yellowish. | Like that of Slaty-headed, but upper mandible less red, colour of lower mandible disputed, (claimed yellow; may be black). |
| Head                        | Bright red with generous blue wash.             | Dark slaty-grey.                                                 | Forehead and around eye rufous-purple; rest of head and cheek slaty-purple.                                                |
| Back                        | Yellowish-green.                                | Dark grass-green.                                                | Yellowish-green.                                                                                                           |
| Rump and upper-tail coverts | Green with generous blue wash.                  | Grass-green.                                                     | Green with slight bluish tinge.                                                                                            |
| Central tail feathers       | About 209 mm long. White tips.                  | About 233 mm long. Yellow tips.                                  | About 220 mm long. Yellowish-white tips.                                                                                   |
| Other tail feathers         | Outer webs bluish-green, tips yellowish-white.  | Outer webs green, tips bright yellow.                            | Outer webs bluish-green, tips bright yellow.                                                                               |
| Underparts                  | Yellowish-green.                                | Green.                                                           | Yellowish-green.                                                                                                           |

Table 1. Plumage characters of Plum-headed, Slaty-headed and Intermediate Parakeets



Very little is known about its call. Sane *et al.*<sup>10</sup> described it as very silent in captivity, but they did hear it give a monosyllabic, loud, throaty call, not unlike that of Rose-ringed Parakeet *P. krameri*. According to Asad Rahmani (*in litt.*) trappers describe its voice as 'different'.

Rothschild<sup>8</sup> exhibited six more of the same form obtained from a London dealer, all collected at about the same time and from an unknown locality. Hartert<sup>5</sup> studied these skins and wrote: 'if it were a hybrid, so many specimens would not very likely have come at the same time, and one would expect them to vary, but they are all alike'. Rothschild's seven specimens, thought to be six males and an immature, are held in the Rothschild collection at the American Museum of Natural History, New York. During the next thirty years Rothschild's and Hartert's papers were overlooked by workers on Indian ornithology, perhaps because of the uncertainty over the origin of the specimens.

Then in 1959 two papers were published, one by Biswas<sup>1</sup> who agreed with Rothschild and Hartert that the Intermediate Parakeet was a valid species, and the other by Husain<sup>6</sup> who made a case for it being a hybrid. Biswas wrote: 'if they were man-made hybrids they would necessarily have been cage birds. But the character of their toes does not indicate this'. He pointed out that the immature bird is a Slaty-headed Parakeet, bringing down the known number of specimens at that time from seven to six. Husain argued that the Intermediate Parakeet must be a hybrid because its appearance is exactly intermediate between Plum-headed and Slaty-headed. While he agreed with Hartert that hybrids normally vary in appearance, he dismissed this point by remarking that first-generation hybrids would not necessarily vary.

Walters<sup>12</sup> pointed out that it seems unlikely that all known specimens are first-generation hybrids, and that Husain had ignored Hartert's more important assertion that finding so many hybrids together and at the same time would be an unlikely occurrence. Walters wrote: 'in any case a hybrid is not necessarily intermediate between its two parents'. He drew attention to some previously overlooked notes by Tavistock<sup>11</sup>, who several times obtained young by pairing a male Slaty-headed with a female Plum-headed Parakeet. These hybrids differed in appearance from Intermediate mainly by having white-tipped, and not yellow-tipped tails. It is unlikely that this difference would be due to the birds being

immatures. The hybrids resembled young Plum-headed Parakeets, but their central tail feathers were a brighter blue and their heads had a dusky tinge.

Sane<sup>9</sup> described a live bird that he had added to his collection, which he thought was an immature male Intermediate Parakeet. Because of its large bill and general colour, which was distinctly different from Plum-headed and Slaty-headed Parakeets, he thought it looked like a hybrid between Plum-headed and Rose-ringed Parakeets.

An Intermediate Parakeet was advertised for sale in the UK in 1976 without a price, the advert claiming that it was 'probably the only known specimen in captivity in the world'.

Sane *et al.*<sup>10</sup> reported that each year between 1979 and 1985 one or two live specimens of Intermediate Parakeet were available in the Indian bird markets. These were reportedly trapped in the plains of Uttar Pradesh around the Mattiyar and Varanasi regions. They carried out a study of the biochemical characteristics of live captive Intermediate and three other closely related Indian parakeets: Slaty-headed, Plum-headed and Rose-ringed. They concluded that their analysis, together with morphological differences, strongly suggested that Intermediate Parakeet was a valid species.

In their paper they describe a puzzling difference in bill colour between their birds and that of Rothschild's type specimen. Rothschild gave the colour of the lower mandible as orange-yellow, and in Forshaw and Cooper<sup>4</sup> a painting of one of Rothschild's specimens illustrates a yellow lower mandible. The lower mandible colour in all three live birds held by Sane, and that of a specimen he deposited in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society, is black. Sane *et al.*<sup>10</sup> accounted for the difference by suggesting that the bill colour of Rothschild's specimens may have been affected by the chemicals used for preserving the specimens. This needs further investigation. If the lower mandible was changed from black to yellow (a process which seems unlikely to occur) it is perhaps strange that the upper mandible retained its red colour. The lower mandible of Slaty-headed is yellow and that of Plum-headed is black.

They disagreed with the sexing of Rothschild's six specimens as males, considering them to be females because they possess a maroon shoulder patch. A live female in their possession had a maroon shoulder patch whilst two males did not. Biswas<sup>2</sup> argued that they gave too much importance to the presence of the wing patch in



determining the sex of parakeets, especially when it may be present, absent or obsolete in one or both sexes of the species closely related to Intermediate Parakeet. All of Rothschild's six specimens have plum-coloured heads; suggesting that they are males because the female Plum-headed has a plain grey head. Unfortunately, Sane *et al.*<sup>10</sup> did not give full plumage descriptions of their birds.

The Intermediate Parakeet is still being reported. Asad Rahmani (*in litt.*) recently wrote that trappers catch this parrot very infrequently. They were selling an individual for more than Rs 2,000 whilst a Plum-headed is normally sold for less than Rs 25. BirdLife International have listed the species as globally threatened and vulnerable (Collar *et al.* 1994<sup>3</sup>). Whilst there are no published reports of free-flying wild birds, there are several identification features which should be clearly visible in the field (see table). Close observations of parakeets in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere in northern India should surely reveal its whereabouts. Unless efforts are made soon to determine its habitat requirements, distribution and any threats, this enigmatic species may disappear.

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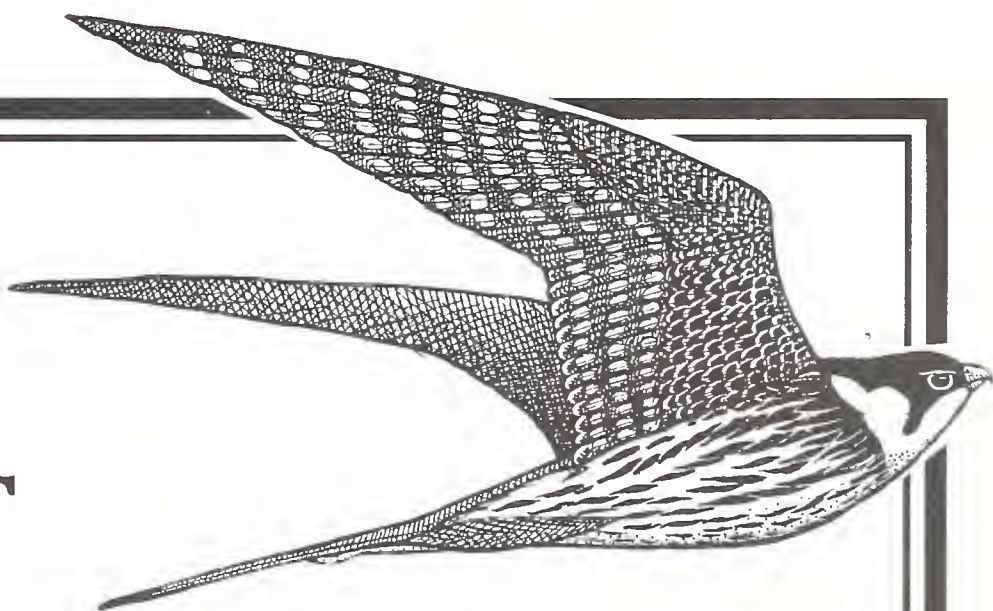
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# Mountain birds in Himachal Pradesh

The State of Himachal Pradesh contains some of the most beautiful and accessible natural habitat in the Western Himalayas. Tony Gaston provides an overview.

The Indian state of Himachal Pradesh consists of the hill regions of the former Punjab State and takes in much of the Western Himalayas. From an ecological standpoint, it can be divided into three regions: the Shiwalik or front ranges, the main Himalayan ranges, and the trans-Himalayan areas of Lahoul, Spiti and Kinnaur. During the British administration, the birds of Himachal were very well documented, because of the presence of the Imperial summer capital at Shimla and the development of several other popular hill stations (Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Kullu). Papers by Hugh Whistler<sup>6,7</sup> on the birds of Kangra and Kullu districts are excellent accounts of representative areas, while that of A. E. Jones<sup>4</sup> on the birds of Shimla, although never completed, is one of the most detailed local birdlists available for the subcontinent.

In recent years, despite the large number of birdwatchers travelling to South Asia, Himachal Pradesh has been relatively neglected. This is probably because the avifauna, although rich, does not approach that of Nepal, the mountains are not so high, and the trans-Himalayan areas were, until recently, less accessible than those of Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, the excellent data available from earlier observers meant that there was less scope for exciting new finds and range extensions. However, Himachal is an enchanting area, both for scenery and culture. It has a wealth of birds and, now that Kashmir is, sadly, a dangerous place for outsiders to travel in, it is the best area to look for those species largely or wholly confined to the Western Himalayas. In this article, I will attempt to give some impressions of what a visiting birdwatcher might find outside of the Tibetan plateau areas, and indicate the current status of mountain birds in the State.

The Shiwalik foothills are clothed, at lower altitudes, with tropical thorn scrub which grades into pine forests at about 1,000 m. In summer, the birds of these areas are very similar to those of the adjacent plains, with the addition of a few species such as the **Red Junglefowl** *Gallus gallus*

(surprisingly common in some areas), **Great Tit** *Parus major*, **Striated Prinia** *Prinia criniger* and **White-browed Scimitar-Babbler** *Pomatorhinus schisticeps*. However, between November and February, these areas receive a flood of winter visitors from the adjacent high ranges; so for those who wish to see mountain birds without getting out of breath, the winter is a good time to visit the Shiwalik areas. At that season, birds such as **Long-tailed Minivets** *Pericrocotus ethologus*, **Yellow-bellied Fantails** *Rhipidura hypoxantha*, **Wallcreepers** *Tichodroma muraria*, **White-collared** and **Grey-winged Blackbirds** *Turdus albocinctus* and *T. bouboul* and **White-capped** and **Plumbeous Water-Redstarts** *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* and *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* become common right to the edge of the plains. Heavy snow may bring down more exotic species, such as **Variegated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax variegatus*, **Scaly-bellied Wren-Babbler** *Pnoepyga albiventer*, **Spectacled Finch** *Callacanthus burtoni* and **Golden Bush Robin** *Tarsiger chrysaeus*. In addition, there are a few longer distance migrants that winter in the Shiwalik zone of the Western Himalayas, namely **Blue-capped Redstart** *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus*, **Black-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* and **Black-throated Accentor** *Prunella atrogularis*.

Two large man-made lakes created by the Bhakra and Pong dams are situated in the lower Shiwalik zone. Both support a variety of water birds, although that created by the Pong Dam is much the better and supports thousands of ducks, herons and waders, as well as being a regular wintering area for **Red-necked** and **Black-necked Grebes** *Podiceps grisegena* and *P. nigricollis*. As the area of the lake varies considerably with the time of year and the abundance of monsoon rain, the best areas for birds vary considerably.

Much of the higher Shiwaliks (1,500-3,000 m) would originally have been covered by oak forest (*Quercus glauca* and *Q. leucotrichophora*), but clearance for cultivation, and the policies of foresters in promoting the deodhar *Cedrus deodara*,





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*Birds of Himachal Pradesh*

1: Blue-throated Barbet  
*Megalaima asiatica* (Photo: Nigel Bean)

2: Fire-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus* (Photo: Nigel Bean)

3: Blue-capped Redstart  
*Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus* (Photo: Nigel Bean)

4: Rufous-breasted Accentor  
*Prunella strophciata* (Photo: Ian Merrill)

5: White-capped Water-Redstart  
*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* (Photo: Nigel Bean)



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Figure 1. The location of Himachal Pradesh.

mean that little lower-altitude oak forest remains. The remaining areas of oak and mixed forest are the most rewarding for birds and the sanctuaries at Chail, Majathal and Naina Devi provide examples. Characteristic birds of these areas include the two Himalayan jays *Garrulus* spp., the **Red-billed Magpie** *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*, the two local *Seicercus* warblers, several species of *Phylloscopus* and *Parus*, and a number of small babblers: **Black-chinned Babbler** *Stachyris pyrrhops*, **White-browed Shrike-Babbler** *Pteruthius flaviscapis*, **Chestnut-tailed Minla** *Minla strigula*, **Rufous Sibia** *Heterophasia capistrata*, and **Whiskered Yuhina** *Yuhina flavicollis*. In summer, several species of flycatchers also occur. Grasslands associated with these sanctuaries support the otherwise very elusive **Cheer Pheasant** *Catreus wallichii*. Late summer, just after the monsoon, is a good season to visit these areas, as the insectivorous birds form large mixed species parties. Once you have located one, it may be possible to follow it for hours, observing several similar species feeding together. This is very helpful for distinguishing the crowned warblers *Phylloscopus occipitalis* and *P. reguloides*, for instance.

The vegetation of the lower parts of the main mountain ranges is similar to that of the higher Shiwaliks. At about 3,000 m, oak/spruce/deodhar forest gives way to a characteristic higher-altitude forest of Kharshu oak *Quercus semicarpifolia* on south aspects and fir *Abies* spp. on north-facing slopes. This zone is inhabited by a very distinctive avifauna including, in summer, **Orange-flanked Bush-Robin** *Tarsiger cyanurus*, **Ashy-throated, Pale-rumped** and **Buff-barred Warblers** *Phylloscopus maculipennis*, *chloronotus* and *pulcher*, **Grey-crested,**

**Dark Grey,** and **Rufous-vented Tits** *Parus dichrous*, *rufonuchalis* and *rubidiventris* (the latter rare), **Yellow-browed Tit** *Sylviparus modestus*, and **White-cheeked Nuthatch** *Sitta leucopsis*. The warblers are found lower down in winter, but the tits hold their ground.

These forests, where undisturbed, also contain **Himalayan Monal** *Lophophorus impejanus*, **Koklass Pheasant** *Pucrasia macrolopha* and **Western Tragopan** *Tragopan melanocephalus*, although the last is mainly confined to the forests of the upper Ravi and Beas valleys. The best place to see the pheasants, and most of the other high-altitude forest birds, is the Great Himalayan National Park, at the southern end of the Kullu Valley<sup>3</sup>. Permission to visit the area must be sought from the Park Director, whose office is at Shamshi, close to the Kullu airport.

Above the forest, which ends at around 4,000 m, there is a zone of subalpine vegetation dominated by birch and rhododendrons and interspersed with high-altitude meadows, most of which are occupied in summer by migrant graziers with herds of sheep, goats and buffalos. **Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*, **Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus* and **Himalayan Griffon** *Gyps himalayensis* are all common in this zone, while **Blue-fronted Redstart** *Phoenicurus frontalis*, **Scaly-bellied Wren-Babbler**, **White-browed Fulvetta** *Alcippe vinipectus*, **White-throated Tit** *Aegithalos niveogularis* and elements of the upper forest zone community inhabit the scrub, augmented in autumn by large flocks of **Rufous-streaked Accentors** *Prunella himalayana* and **Plain Mountain Finches** *Leucosticte nemoricola*. On the highest meadows, the fortunate may find **Snow Partridge** *Lerwa lerwa*, **Grandala** *Grandala coelicolor* or, where marshy, **Solitary Snipe** *Gallinago solitaria*, but none of these is common. The true alpine zone is not rich in birds, but **Rufous-breasted Accentor** *Prunella strophiatea*, **Himalayan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus himalayensis* and **Dark-breasted Rosefinch** *Carpodacus nipalensis* all occur.

The trans-Himalayan zone has been made accessible by the recent opening of most parts of Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur to tourists. My own experience of these areas is limited to Lahul, which provides a transition between the ecosystems of the front ranges and those of the Tibetan plateau. Open forests of Pencil Cedar *Juniperus macropoda* and Kail *Pinus wallichiana* support mainly a depauperate selection of Himalayan forest birds, especially **Great Tit** (found here at much greater altitude than in the front ranges), **Dark Grey Tit**, **White-cheeked Nuthatch**, **Pale-rumped Warbler** and **Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*. **Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasii*, **Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*, **Black Redstart**



*Phoenicurus ochruros*, **Winter Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*, **Fire-fronted Serin** *Serinus pusillus*, **Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia* and **Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* are common practically everywhere. Most people would probably visit Lahul en route to Ladakh, where they are likely to get a much better introduction to the true Tibetan avifauna.

There are no birds that are unique to Himachal Pradesh and the number of species endemic to the Western Himalayas is also small. A few species that breed in the state are listed in the latest *Birds to Watch*<sup>1</sup> as being of possible concern: **Western Tragopan**, **Cheer Pheasant**, **Wood Snipe** *Gallinago nemoricola* (all considered vulnerable), **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*, **Red-headed Vulture** *Sarcogyps calvus*, **Long-billed Thrush** *Zoothera monticola*, **White-throated Tit** and **Orange Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula aurantiaca* (all listed as near-threatened).

The two pheasants are the subject of some conservation efforts. The creation of the Great Himalayan National Park was, in part, an attempt to safeguard the largest population of Western Tragopan known at that time. Currently, there may be anywhere from 20-100 Western Tragopans in the area and the total population of the State is probably less than a thousand<sup>2</sup>. The status of the Cheer Pheasant may be a little less precarious, as it is widespread throughout the lower hills, albeit in small pockets<sup>5</sup>. As no hunting is allowed in the State at present, the main threat to these birds comes from habitat destruction, but that has also slowed with the current ban on the felling of reserve forest. Populations may be holding their own.

The Wood Snipe has been reported periodically, but possible confusion with Solitary Snipe makes its status hard to evaluate. As the Solitary Snipe is very sparsely distributed in the State, the Wood Snipe cannot be better than very rare. I have seen it only once to my complete satisfaction. Similarly, there is a scattering of recent sightings of the Cinereous Vulture, but no definite evidence of breeding. Neither seems to have been common in the past<sup>6</sup>. Single Red-headed Vultures can be seen fairly regularly at Shimla and Kullu (and probably elsewhere), but the total number in the State is probably small. The species is more common in the hills of Uttar Pradesh.

The Long-billed Thrush affects heavy forest with dense understorey at about 2,000 m. It can usually be found in the Great Himalayan National Park, but I have few records elsewhere. This species is likely to have been adversely affected by the extension of temperate agriculture into the deciduous forests.

The White-throated Tit, on the other hand, is common – even abundant – in the subalpine zone, especially among birches: its habitat is unlikely to have been much affected by human activities. The Orange Bullfinch, one of the most spectacular-looking birds you can hope to see, is so rare that I have never seen it in 25 years of visits to Himachal. The species is found mainly in Kashmir, although there are records as far east as Shimla.

There is no need to take lengthy hikes to find the characteristic birds of Himachal Pradesh. Most of the temperate forest birds can be seen within an hour's walk of the State capital in Shimla (ask for 'the glen') and the summit of Rhotang Pass (between Manali and Lahul) is an excellent place to see the alpine and subalpine species. Even the elusive Cheer can be heard from motorable roads in places. The birder with limited time will be able to see most of the same species and many more in Corbett or Rajaji Parks, across the border in Uttar Pradesh, but for those who prefer their birdwatching to be leisurely and are not concerned about maximising their world list, Himachal can be a very rewarding place to visit.

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*Chestnut-tailed Minla*  
*Minla strigula* by  
Serge Nicolle







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1: Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* (Photo: Simon Cook)

2: Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* (Photo: Tim Loseby)

3: Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* (Photo: Tim Loseby)

4: Pallas's Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* (Photo: Tim Loseby)

5: White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* (Photo: Thakur Dalip Singh)

6: Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis* (Photo: Perwez Iqbal)

7: Snow Partridge *Lerwa lerwa* (Photo: Thakur Dalip Singh)

8: Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* (Photo: Pete Morris)

9: Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* (Photo: Henk Hendriks)

10: Laggar Falcon *Falco jugger* (Photo: Henk Hendriks)

11: Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* (Photo: Thakur Dalip)

# Canon



# Showcase

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# Wetlands of ornithological significance in the Delhi region

Abdul Jamil Urfi describes the rich variety of some of the wetlands in and around Delhi, highlights other potentially good sites which have not been fully surveyed for more than 20 years, and comments on conservation needs at some of the sites.

The river Yamuna and its associated wetlands attract a rich variety of birds to India's capital Delhi, and to neighbouring parts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh states. Overall, 21 families of water dependent birds (excluding passerines) are represented. This includes 23 species of pelecaniiformes and ciconiiformes with nesting records, and 35 species of passage/over-wintering waterfowl and waders<sup>1</sup>. Some of the major flyways of migratory waterbirds pass through this region.

The wetlands which attract birds are of several types, namely marshes associated with the river Yamuna, its irrigation canals and drains; seepage ponds close to these waterbodies; shallow rain-fed depressions; village ponds; river barrages and concrete-lined city ponds.

The map shows some of the important sites which I have surveyed since 1990.

## Sultanpur 'Jheel'

This shallow rain-fed depression, about 2 km<sup>2</sup> in area and only 50 km from Delhi, was declared a bird sanctuary in 1971. **Greater Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus ruber* are often seen there and it is held that the brackish water in this lake is conducive for their food species<sup>1</sup>. Some other large waterbirds recorded there include **Black-necked Stork** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, **Demoiselle Crane** *Grus virgo*, **Common Crane** *G. grus*, **Painted Stork** *Mycteria leucocephala*, **Black-headed Ibis** *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, and **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*. Among Sultanpur's regular nesters are **Spot-billed Duck** *Anas poecilorhyncha*, **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*, **Sarus Crane** *Grus antigone*, **Red-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus indicus*, and also cormorants, egrets, herons and rails. In winter, many types of duck are to be seen there such as **Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*, **Northern Shoveler** *A. clypeata*, **Mallard** *A. platyrhynchos*, **Garganey** *A. querquedula*, **Common Teal** *A. crecca*, and **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*. Among the waders **White-tailed**

**Lapwing** *Vanellus leucurus*, **Spur-winged Lapwing** *V. spinosus*, **Yellow-wattled Lapwing** *V. malabaricus*, **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*, **Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*, **Common Sandpiper** *T. hypoleucos*, and **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* are commonly seen.

## Bhindawas Lake

This is one of Haryana's largest wetlands and was declared a bird sanctuary in 1986. It is a low-lying area (about 412 ha) with an embankment (or bund) along its sides. Before the construction of the bund, the area and villages in its vicinity often used to get flooded by the waters of the river Sahibi. In 1978-79, village land was acquired by the irrigation department and the bund built as a flood control measure. A mosaic of marsh, pond and wet grassland habitats now exists within the boundaries of the bund<sup>5</sup>. Consequently the bird life of Bhindawas is very rich and is almost certainly the most important wetland in the Delhi area, with 200 species of bird having been recorded<sup>4</sup>. **Sarus Crane**, **Black-necked Stork**, **Painted Stork**, **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*, **Red-naped Ibis** *Pseudibis papillosa*, **Woolly-necked Stork** *Ciconia episcopus*, and both **Grey** *Ardea cinerea* and **Purple Heron** *A. purpurea* are usually seen. Many types of waders and waterfowl are present. Raptors such as **Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* and **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* fly overhead.

The area at the confluence of the bund and an outflowing drain (drain no. 8) is ornithologically very interesting. On a largish pond there **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*, **Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio*, **Common Coot** *Fulica atra*, **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, **Cotton Pygmy-Goose** *Nettapus coromandelianus*, **Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*, **Tufted Duck** *A. fuligula*, **Garganey** and **Common Teal** are seen. On some tall eucalyptus trees close



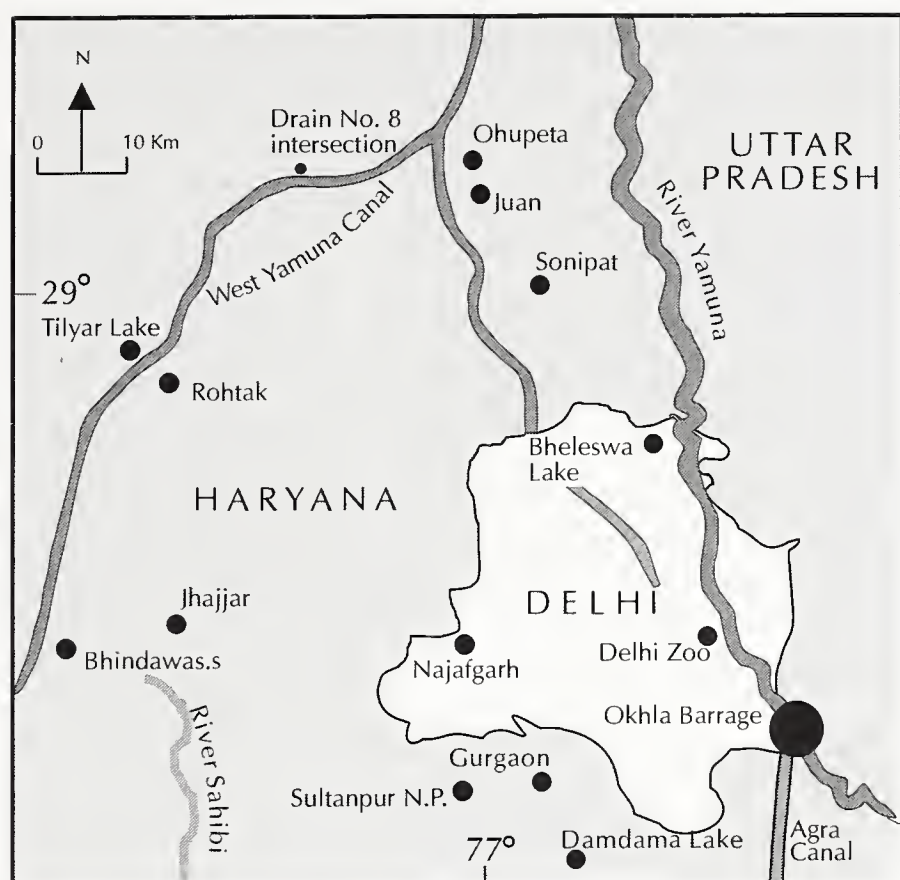


Figure 1. Location of important wetlands in the Delhi region.

by, **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* nests can be seen: probably one of the few instances of waterbirds breeding on this tree species.

### Okhla Barrage

This artificial wetland is located at the point where the river Yamuna leaves the territory of Delhi and enters Uttar Pradesh. It was declared a bird sanctuary just a few years ago. The area which the lake occupies today was once the sandy river bed overgrown with *Typha* and other vegetation. A few trees, dead now due to waterlogging, still stand in the lake as a testimony to changed times, and are used by cormorants, **Oriental Darter** *Anhinga melanogaster* and kites for roosting.

Bird diversity is strongly influenced by the sporadic water level fluctuations in the lake. More than 160 species of birds have been seen there. Of particular note are **Black-necked Stork**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*, **Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus*, and **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*<sup>6</sup>. In winter, Okhla Barrage lake teems with thousands of migratory coot and diving ducks such as **Common Pochard**, and dabbling ducks are well represented as large numbers of **Northern Pintail**, **Shoveler**, **Gadwall** *Anas strepera* and others can be seen. On some sandy islands in the middle of the lake storks, an occasional pair of **Sarus Cranes** and large numbers of **Ruddy Shelduck** and waders can be observed.

The various seepage ponds on the sides of the barrage are good birding spots. There one can see

kingfishers, herons, **Pheasant-tailed** and **Bronze-winged Jacanas** *Metopidius indicus*, **Lesser Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna javanica*, **Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata*, gulls and terns.

### Other wetlands

Najafgarh Lake in west Delhi, which is part of a 45 km long drain, is an interesting birding site. Although much of the area is severely polluted there are still some relatively clean spots where wintering waterfowl congregate in large numbers, and where some years ago **Indian Skimmer** *Rynchops albicollis* was sighted<sup>3</sup>.

During a field study in 1992 some lesser-known wetlands, along the western Yamuna Canal in Sonipat district of Haryana, were explored<sup>8</sup>. Many village ponds and disused parts of irrigation drains turned out to be surprisingly rich in bird life, despite human presence in their immediate vicinity and their unprotected status. For instance storks, ibises, spoonbills, cranes and large numbers of waterfowl and waders were seen in wetlands close to the villages of Juan and Dhupeta. At the intersection of drain no. 8 and the western Yamuna Canal (see map) many interesting birds were seen, including large flocks (c.100 birds) of **Bar-headed Geese** *Anser indicus* feeding on grassy patches.

### Heronries

Four heronries are known from the Delhi region<sup>7</sup>. The largest and most consistent one is at the Delhi Zoo. There, mesquite trees *Prosopis juliflora* growing on various islands in the zoo's ponds have been regular nesting sites for many species since the 1960s including **Painted Stork** (globally 'near-threatened'), **Black-headed Ibis**, **Indian Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, **Little Cormorant** *P. niger*, **Indian Pond-Heron** *Ardeola grayii*, **Black-crowned Night-Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*, **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*, **Intermediate Egret** *Mesophoyx intermedia*, and **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*.

Tilyar Lake near Rohtak in Haryana is also an important nesting site for **Black-headed Ibis**, **Oriental Darter** and species of cormorant and egret. Although **Eurasian Spoonbills** are often seen in juvenile plumage, where (and if at all) they breed in the Delhi region is a mystery.

### Conservation of wetlands

Certainly many changes have taken place in the wetlands since 1975, when an authoritative account of Delhi's birds by Usha Ganguli was published<sup>1</sup>. It would be worthwhile revisiting some of the





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#### *Birds of the Delhi wetlands*

1: Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (Photo: Thakur Dalip Singh)

2: Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* (Photo: Patrick Beiréus) '

3: Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (Photo: Tim Loseby)

4: Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* (Photo: Tim Loseby)

5: River Tern *Sterna aurantia* (Photo: Thakur Dalip Singh)

5





wetland sites mentioned in her book, and exploring their ornithological diversity, especially some of the larger ones, such as Damdama Lake, Bhatkal Lake (both in Haryana) and Bhaleswa Lake. It is important too to keep up the search for other wetlands and heronries in the countryside around Delhi.

At Bhindawas and Okhla it seems from visual estimates that the number of wintering waterfowl at each is in excess of 10,000. If more accurate field counts can confirm this figure then a case for pushing for these wetlands to be recognised as Ramsar sites must be made.

Although the smaller, unprotected wetlands are threatened in various ways, (e.g. fishing, poaching, drainage, pollution, siltation etc.) the protected ones have problems, perhaps arising from set notions about park management on the part of the concerned authorities. For example, at Sultanpur Jheel there is concern that in the name of conservation (and for meeting the demands of wildlife tourism) the park authorities are taking steps which are actually destroying the original 'jheel' ecosystem. By pumping in tube-well water, efforts are being made to keep the jheel permanently flooded when it should naturally remain dry for a part of the year (this is conducive to nesting of certain birds like Black-winged Stilt, Red-wattled Lapwing etc.). Planting of *Prosopis* trees on the wetland's periphery, and allowing the grasses to grow, is accelerating the process of ecological succession from wetland to woodland. According to Gaston<sup>2</sup>, because of these steps 'birds have been gained; history has been lost'. Perhaps what is needed most of all is that serious consideration be given as to how Delhi's wetlands should be managed in a way which would keep the interests of bird conservation and the inevitable pressures of development and human usage in view.

#### Acknowledgements

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# A fresh initiative to conserve the Lesser Florican

Listed by BirdLife International as critically threatened, the superb Lesser Florican is attracting concern within and outside India. Ravi Sankaran outlines a new project to protect this jewel of the grasslands.

The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* is endemic to the Indian subcontinent, and was once the commonest and most widely distributed of bustards in India. Its decline was noted as early as the mid-19th century due to excessive hunting pressures<sup>5,4</sup>. But now, owing to widespread and intensive changes in land-use practices, particularly over grazing of its grassland habitat, the Lesser Florican appears to be seriously threatened with extinction.

However, new initiatives to try to save the species have been put into action following a workshop held in India in 1994, and there is now some hope that this is one extinction which may be prevented.

The Lesser Florican breeds during the South-West monsoon, which normally begins by the end of June. During this period, birds move into Gujarat, eastern Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh and some parts of the Deccan<sup>5,1,9</sup>. During the breeding season, males are territorial for two to three months, and are conspicuous both because of their nuptial plumage and their attraction displays, which can be heard up to 500 m away<sup>8,9</sup>. Females and immature males are inconspicuous and much more difficult to locate. After breeding, the Lesser Florican appears to disperse into suitable habitat over much of the Indian subcontinent, with the majority moving into southern India<sup>5,10</sup>.

The primary breeding habitat is grassland with sufficient cover. Fodder-producing grassland is the most favoured and optimal, but such habitat is fragmented and patchily distributed throughout the breeding range. These patches are protected from grazing animals by the government or by agriculturists for fodder and are known as *bheed*, *vidi* or *rakhaal* in different regions. The florican also uses croplands, lightly wooded country, grazed areas and scrubland.

The traditional human utilisation of grasslands in the florican's breeding area, which lies in a

drought-prone region, evolved to cater for two basic needs: fodder production and livestock grazing. Every village, or group of villages, set aside land for grazing, called *gouchar*, and areas which were protected from grazing (*bheed*, *vidi* or *rakhaal*), where the grass was allowed to grow long for hay production. These protected grasslands were crucial to the rural economy, as the hay produced was used both during the lean summer months and to tide stock over drought periods.

Today, protected fodder-yielding grasslands are perhaps the most fragmented and threatened habitat types in India. With changes in land-use practices, they have diminished in size, quality of fodder species and yield. The protected grasslands which remain are under tremendous pressure, both from livestock overgrazing and from conversion to agriculture, despite the fact that fodder shortages are now severe. Without a long-term development policy to restore degraded grasslands to fodder-producing lands, the future of animal husbandry, and of the species of fauna and flora that depend on this habitat in western India, is bleak.

What makes the Lesser Florican so special, and a symbol of this need for long-term planning, is that its conservation needs coincide with human needs. Its survival calls for a continuation of management practices that have traditionally been associated with *bheeds*, *vidis* and *rakhaals*, and an increase in protected grasslands, which will result in an increase in fodder production.

## Surveys of the Lesser Florican

In 1994, I carried out a survey of 77 sites in the Kathiawad peninsula and the Malwa plateau, totalling some 3,692 km<sup>2</sup>. Of these, 68 sites covering just under 280 km<sup>2</sup> were suitable for the Lesser Florican.

Prior to this study, status surveys of the Lesser Florican were made in 1981<sup>2,3</sup>, 1982<sup>6,7,11,12</sup> and 1989<sup>10</sup>.



Data were also collected as part of long-term ecological studies and localised surveys between 1984 and 1988<sup>9,10</sup>. Using data from all these recent sources, as well as the older references, and by extrapolating the information over the entire breeding range, a worrying picture of the distribution and status of the Lesser Florican emerges.

### Status of the Lesser Florican

The breeding range of the Lesser Florican has shrunk to 40% of its original size. This species now breeds only in what can be regarded as the historical core of the breeding range; and even here nowhere as commonly as before. The floricans now breed in some numbers only in the Malwa plateau, the Kathiawad peninsula, Kutch and in parts of eastern Rajasthan.

The estimated population of Lesser Floricans fell by about 60% between 1982 and 1989. Data from Magrath *et al.*<sup>6</sup> shows that in 1982 there were an estimated 4,374 birds<sup>9</sup>, but by 1989 the number of floricans had fallen to 1,672 (estimate revised from the original by this study to take into account known errors). Sankaran *et al.*<sup>10</sup> attributed this loss to the severe drought that gripped western India between 1985 and 1987, as there was apparently no significant variation in numbers of floricans in the pre-drought years. The 1994 survey shows a population of 2,206, an increase of about 32% on the 1989 figure. This can be attributed to the five consecutive years of moderate to good rainfall that western India had between 1989 and 1994.

However, although this recent increase in population is encouraging, the long-term trend is less so, as it is evident that the climb in population is much slower than the drought-related crashes. The annual rate of increase between 1989 and 1994 was 5.7%, whereas the average annual rate of decline between 1982 and 1989 was about 13% (when drought years accounted for only three out of the seven years, so that the actual rate of decline in those drought years would be much higher).

As western India, Saurashtra and Kutch are particularly prone to drought, with at least partial drought conditions prevailing once in two to three years, and major droughts every fourth or fifth year, it is probable that the Lesser Florican population is incapable of recovering to pre-drought conditions. If population growth continued as it has done since 1989, with no drought, it would take another 10 to 12 years before the florican population reached 1984 levels.

Yet the next drought is imminent, making the recovery of the Lesser Florican population unlikely.

### Conservation perspective

Habitat conservation and control of hunting are the two clearly defined fronts where conservation work for the Lesser Florican needs to be directed. Of critical importance to the survival of the Lesser Florican is the need for a significant increase in the grassland area protected from grazing, and the maintenance of the quality of all fodder-producing grasslands. The immediate need is to ensure that hunting pressures are significantly reduced, and that every area in which the florican breeds has individuals who have been motivated to protect this species.

*Habitat loss* There was little change in government-owned fodder-producing grasslands (see Sankaran *et al.*<sup>11</sup> for details) between 1989 and 1994, and the Forest Department *vidis* continue to be in good health.

The situation in privately owned grasslands in this period is, however, alarming. In many areas between, 40% and 70% of protected grassland were lost to agriculture, leased to graziers, or ploughed up. Other areas are likely to be lost soon.

In the Malwa plateau, the least drought-prone and hence most important part of the breeding range of the Lesser Florican, the situation is alarming. In my study area at Sailana, Ratlam, half of the 200 ha of grassland present in 1989 had been converted to cropland or leased out for livestock grazing by 1994. A qualitative assessment of the known loss of habitat amongst areas that have been studied in the past indicates that in the Malwa plateau between 1989 and 1995 up to 25% of private fodder-producing grasslands were converted to agriculture or leased for grazing. Given that the majority of the florican's grassland breeding habitat there is privately owned, there is little control over the probable loss of further habitat.

*Hunting* The actual extent of hunting pressure and the numbers of birds killed is unclear. However, it is known that hunting with guns or snares continues to be widespread. In two less-known localities where large numbers of floricans breed local villagers took six to eight birds from one and four or five in the other. 'Sportsmen' from cities and towns also still shoot florican.

### New conservation initiatives

In December 1994, a workshop on the conservation of the Lesser Florican was held in Baroda, Gujarat,



attracting 95 participants. A conservation strategy for the birds was drawn up including management recommendations for fodder-producing grasslands, a commitment to encourage government to increase the area of protected grasslands (changing current use from grazing land), and a plan to involve non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals in florican protection on privately owned land through a project called Florican Watch.

A campaign has been started to convince the relevant state governments of the importance of certain key sites, and it is hoped that some of these will be protected as fodder-producing grasslands in a couple of years.

The Florican Watch project has also begun its work to identify areas important for the Lesser Florican, and make an inventory of protected grasslands in each district; to identify and motivate one individual at village level in important florican areas, who will protect the Lesser Florican around his or her village; and to educate people on the conservation and sustainable use of grasslands.

In its first season, the Florican Watch has been instrumental in a widespread awareness programme. A series of articles on the Lesser Florican has appeared in newspapers in local languages, and a poster has been widely circulated (see colour plate). There has been a fair amount of 'florican watching' this past monsoon, and a commitment to save the florican appears to be spreading.

### Acknowledgements

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## खडमोर बचाओ ।





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1: Female Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*  
 (Photo: Ravi Sankaran)

2: Posters are being distributed throughout  
 villages where the florican occurs

3: Displaying male Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*  
 (Photo: Ravi Sankaran)

4: Male Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*  
 (Photo: Ravi Sankaran)

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# Spot-billed Pelican in Assam

In this article Bibhab Kumar Talukdar summarises the current status of the Spot-billed Pelican in Assam, which is one of its last remaining breeding areas for this formerly widespread species. He suggests that further work on the species is needed so that the population in Assam can be safeguarded.

## Globally threatened species

The Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* was once widespread in Asia, but has suffered a considerable decline in the past few decades. The total world population is now estimated at 11,500 individuals (not necessarily mature)<sup>1,2</sup>. Breeding is only currently confirmed in India, Sri Lanka and Cambodia, suspected in Sumatra, and there are recent non-breeding records from Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Its status is poorly known in China (largely because of confusion with Dalmatian Pelican *P. crispus*), Laos (formerly present, but not observed during recent surveys) and Myanmar (millions of birds until the early 1900s). Owing to its considerable population decline the species is listed as globally threatened with a 'Vulnerable' status<sup>1</sup>.

The state of Assam (78,523 km<sup>2</sup>) holds the most potential breeding habitat of the pelican in India. Here, I summarise the current state of knowledge for the species in Assam.

## Breeding in Assam

*Pelecanus philippensis* is sporadically distributed in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, with most sites located in the central and eastern part of the state (Figure 1). There are five breeding colonies thus far known for the pelican (Table 1), with Kaziranga National Park in central Assam being by far the most important of them. I estimate the population of the Spot-billed Pelican in Assam to be no more than 1,500 individuals.

Fortunately three of the five pelican colonies are within the state's protected area network, under Assam's Wildlife Division of Forestry Department. The species has also been sighted regularly in the Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary since 1990, but nesting has yet to be confirmed there.

Nest-building starts from mid-September. Nests are generally built in trees and positioned about 15-18 m high, with as many as 6 to 12 nests in a

single tree. *Bombax ceiba* trees are popular nest sites, especially in the whorls where four or more branches abut. However, in the Orang Wildlife Sanctuary, the nests were found in a *Ficus* sp. and, interestingly, Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* nested in the same *Ficus* tree there.

The circumference of a pelican nest is about 150-210 cm with enough depth to accommodate the parents and their young. In Kaziranga National Park and Orang Wildlife Sanctuary, a maximum of four eggs was laid in each clutch and the incubation period ranged from 30-35 days. It took around five months before the young could fly. By February most nests were deserted, but in a few cases the young remained nest-bound until March.

## Identifying threats

Collar *et al.*<sup>1</sup> think that the most likely reasons for the decline of the Spot-billed Pelican in Asia are a combination of human disturbance, hunting, destruction of nesting and roosting/loafing areas, declines in fish availability and increased pesticide usage. Certainly some of these threats are faced by pelican populations in Assam. I think that human activities near to both the nesting sites and the general feeding habitats of the pelican are major

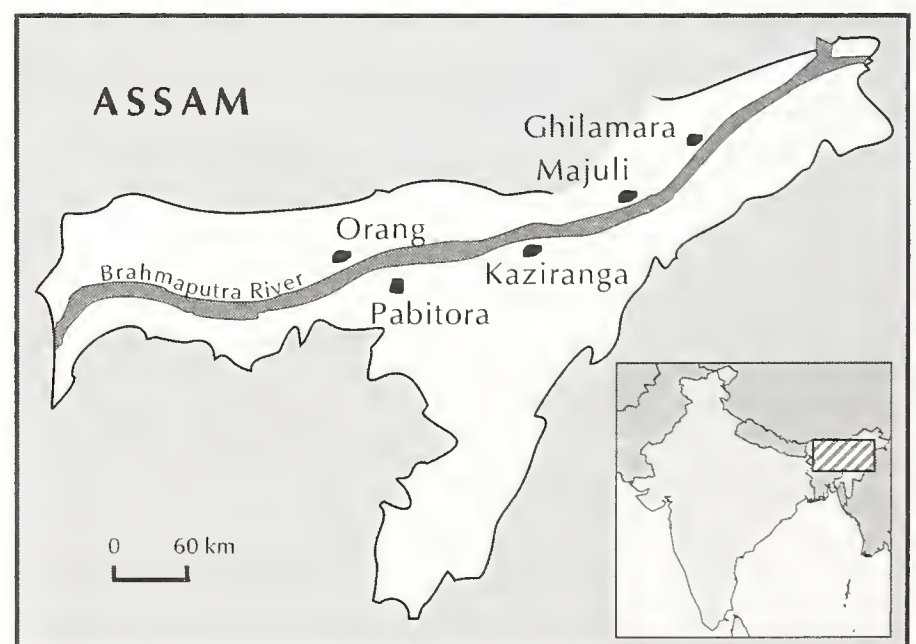


Figure 1. Spot-billed Pelican sites in Assam.



Table 1. Colonies of Spot-billed Pelican in Assam with number of nests given for different years.

| LOCALITY                                         | YEAR | NUMBER OF NESTS |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------|
| Kaziranga National Park                          | 1984 | 600             |
|                                                  | 1991 | 155             |
|                                                  | 1993 | 219             |
| Orang Wildlife Sanctuary                         | 1990 | 45              |
|                                                  | 1993 | 39              |
|                                                  | 1994 | 42              |
| Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary                      | 1988 | 6               |
|                                                  | 1991 | 6               |
| Ghilamara<br>(near Bordoibam proposed sanctuary) | 1990 | 3               |
| Majuli Area                                      | 1992 | 8               |
|                                                  | 1993 | 11              |

threats for the species in Assam. Prime threats are probably the scarcity of fish resources in the wetlands and lack of suitable nesting trees owing to illegal felling of trees, especially *Bombax ceiba*. Additionally, grasslands have been burnt around and under pelican colonies. In the future increased tourism to Assam, principally Kaziranga, could be a problem. So I believe that tourism must be regulated properly, and I would suggest that,

especially during the breeding season, a safe distance (200-300 m) must be maintained from the pelican colonies.

Further studies needed

Around 600 nests were counted in Kaziranga National Park in 1984-85. Dramatically their number decreased to only 155 by 1991 but increased to 255 in 1993, giving some hope that the species may be further revived in this national park. However, the reasons for the fluctuations in nesting pairs is not understood. Further study that includes monitoring known breeding populations, searches for new populations, and ecology of the Spot-billed Pelican is needed. Only then can we develop an action plan to ensure the survival of the Spot-billed Pelican in one of its last remaining breeding areas.

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1: Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (Photo: Thakur Dalip Singh)

2: Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* (Photo: Tim Loseby)

3: Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* (Photo: Thakur Dalip Singh)

4: Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (Photo: Tim Loseby)

5: Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (left) and Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (right) (Photo: Per Smitterberg)





# Storks of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam

Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, Rathin Barman, P. C. Bhattacharjee and N. C. Sarma summarise the results of a survey conducted to look at the stork populations in one of Assam’s few protected areas.

### Storks as indicators

There has been considerable interest in Asian storks because of rapid population declines. Being large predators and scavengers near the top of the food chain these declines indicate the worsening state of the ecosystems they are part of<sup>2</sup>. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the five globally threatened stork species are all listed because of the unabated destruction and pollution of their habitats<sup>1</sup>.

Of the eleven species of storks recorded in Asia, eight species are found in India, with Assam in north-east India harbouring seven of them. We initiated a survey in the little explored Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary of Assam to assess the status of the various storks inhabiting this reserve.

### Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary

The Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary (27°40’N 95°24’E) covers 650 km<sup>2</sup> in the civil district of Tinsukia in eastern Assam<sup>3</sup>, at an altitude of 90-100m. The Dibru and Saikhowa Reserved Forests were jointly declared the Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary in 1986. This wildlife sanctuary (WLS) is bordered to the north by the River Brahmaputra and the south by the River Dibru. The vegetation of Dibru-Saikhowa WLS includes tropical moist deciduous forests, tropical semi-evergreen forests, bamboo and cane-brakes, reedbeds and alluvial grasslands. The climate of Dibru-Saikhowa WLS can be termed as ‘sub-tropical moist’, with annual rainfall between 2,500-3,500 mm, average maximum temperatures of 36°C and minimum of 5°C, and relative humidity ranging between 64-86%<sup>4</sup>.

### Stork survey

The stork survey was conducted in Dibru-Saikhowa WLS during various seasons from 1992-1994, and a total of six species of storks was recorded (Table 1, where scientific names are given).

The Lesser Adjutant and Asian Openbill were found to be scattered throughout Dibru-Saikhowa. The Asian Openbill is the commonest stork in the

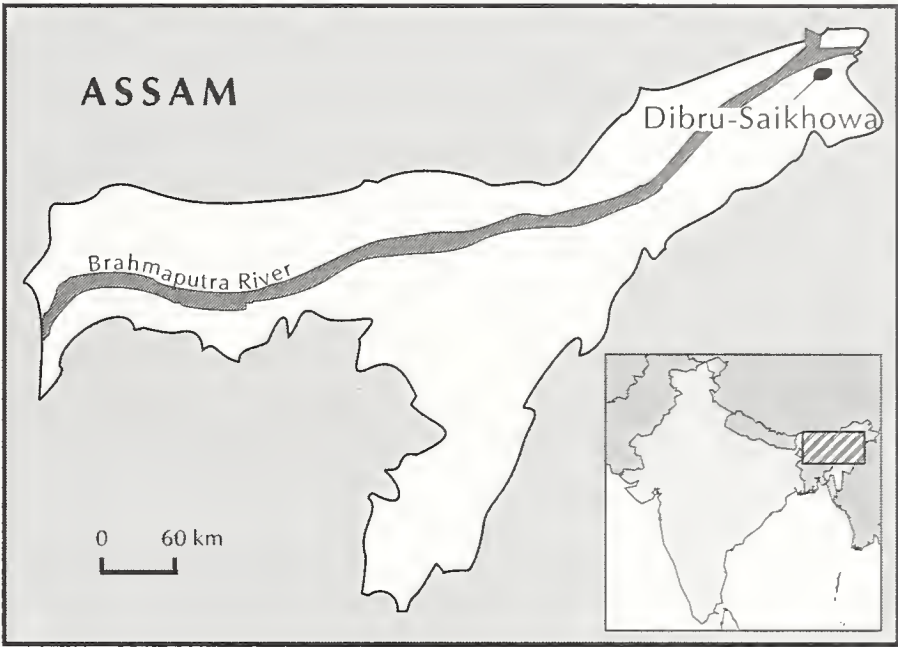


Figure 1. The location of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Reserve.

reserve with an estimated 200 individuals. This is a significantly higher population than that of Lesser Adjutant, the next commonest species, whose population numbered some 20 individuals. Unfortunately, the populations of Black Stork, Woolly-necked Stork, and Black-necked Stork were found to be very small, while numbers of White Stork fluctuated during our survey period (Table 1).

|                                                                                                           |           |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| LESSER ADJUTANT                                                                                           |           |     |
| <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>                                                                              | c (200)   | RB  |
| ASIAN OPENBILL                                                                                            |           |     |
| <i>Anastomus oscitans</i>                                                                                 | c (20)    | RB  |
| BLACK STORK                                                                                               |           |     |
| <i>Ciconia nigra</i>                                                                                      | r (12)    | M?  |
| WOOLLY-NECKED STORK                                                                                       |           |     |
| <i>Ciconia episcopus</i>                                                                                  | r (12)    | RB? |
| WHITE STORK                                                                                               |           |     |
| <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>                                                                                    | vr (4-11) | M   |
| BLACK-NECKED STORK                                                                                        |           |     |
| <i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>                                                                         | vr (<10)  | RB? |
| (Key: R=resident; B=breeding recorded; M=migratory; B?=breeding not recorded; c=common; r=rare, vr=rare ) |           |     |

Table 1. Survey results.



Of the five resident stork species in Assam nesting was confirmed for only Lesser Adjutant and Asian Openbill during our survey. However, the rarer Woolly-necked and Black-necked Storks may breed and, if not, the wildlife sanctuary still provides important feeding areas for them. There are several wetlands in the wildlife sanctuary (Kolomy beel, Dighali beel, Xal beel, Torali beel, Buri beel) that are known feeding areas for most of the storks.

### Conserving a future

Of particular concern is the Black-necked Stork population which is now very rare in the sanctuary and, according to forest guards and local people near the reserve, is still decreasing. It is now only occasionally sighted around Balijan, Xal beel and Kolomy. It is to be hoped that this species does not become as rare as the globally threatened Greater Adjutant which was historically recorded from Dibru-Saikhowa but was not seen during our survey (but see p. 15 this issue).

Dibru-Saikhowa WLS is an important site for the conservation of storks in Assam. The presence of six species in the WLS indicates the habitat richness of the area, but clearly changes have caused the disappearance of Greater Adjutant and

a decline in Black-necked Storks. Regular stork surveys at Dibru-Saikhowa are needed so that the populations can be monitored and safeguarded into and beyond the next century.

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| <b>CULLMAN</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |              |       |              |       |                  |       |                |  |                    |       |             |       |              |       |                    |       |                 |  |                  |       |                  |      |                        |       |                                       |  |
| Hide mount (Magic)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 59.99                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |              |       |              |       |                  |       |                |  |                    |       |             |       |              |       |                    |       |                 |  |                  |       |                  |      |                        |       |                                       |  |
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| Photo ad. leather case                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 15.50                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |              |       |              |       |                  |       |                |  |                    |       |             |       |              |       |                    |       |                 |  |                  |       |                  |      |                        |       |                                       |  |
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| <p><b>OPEN MON-FRI</b><br/><b>9.30-5.30</b><br/><b>SAT 9.30-4.00</b><br/><b>CLOSED SUNDAYS &amp; BANK HOLIDAYS</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |              |       |              |       |                  |       |                |  |                    |       |             |       |              |       |                    |       |                 |  |                  |       |                  |      |                        |       |                                       |  |



# The decline of the Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Nicobar Islands

It is not only the elephants, tigers, bears and other large animals of this world that are being threatened by international trade in their parts and derivatives. Ravi Sankaran describes the decline of the Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Nicobars through the over-collection of its nests for Chinese cuisine and pharmacy.

## Secreting money

If it were not for a fascinating biological attribute, that of building their nests entirely out of saliva, the Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia fuciphaga* would not be threatened today. Ever since the 16th century, when swiftlet nests became an important item in Chinese cuisine and pharmacy, Edible-nest Swiftlets have been exploited throughout their range<sup>7,10</sup>. Today their nests are valued in the retail market at US\$2,620–4,060 a kilogram<sup>7</sup>, estimates ranging from 70 or 125 nests per kg<sup>1,7</sup>, ranking it amongst the world's most expensive animal products. Populations of Edible-nest Swiftlet (Andamans and Nicobars, South-East Asia, Java, Sumatra and the Lesser Sundas) are now unable to withstand the magnitude of exploitation, with declines in some populations of swiftlets and extinction of others<sup>7</sup>.

While most species of the genus *Collocalia* use saliva to bind leaf, moss or feathers into nests, Edible-nest Swiftlets build nests wholly of the mucilaginous secretion of the paired sublingual glands<sup>8</sup>. Upon drying, the saliva forms a hard white cement, which forms the nest cup and secures the bracket-shaped nest to the cave wall<sup>6</sup>. Nests made wholly of saliva by Edible-nest Swiftlet, Germain's Swiftlet *C. germani*, and those made with an admixture of feathers and vegetation by Black-nest Swiftlet *C. maxima* and Indian Swiftlet *C. unicolor* are commercially exploited.

## Trading in the Andamans and Nicobars

The Edible-nest Swiftlet is confined in India to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, nesting in caves on cliffs or rock faces on the coast and on the hills to the interior. The history of trade in swiftlet nests from these islands is uncertain, but has probably been going on for over two centuries<sup>2,3,4</sup>. The earliest reference appears to be from the late 17th or 18th century, when Malays and Burmese procured considerable quantities of these nests from the Andamans, either collecting them themselves or through trading with natives<sup>3,11</sup>. By the 19th century the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were a regular

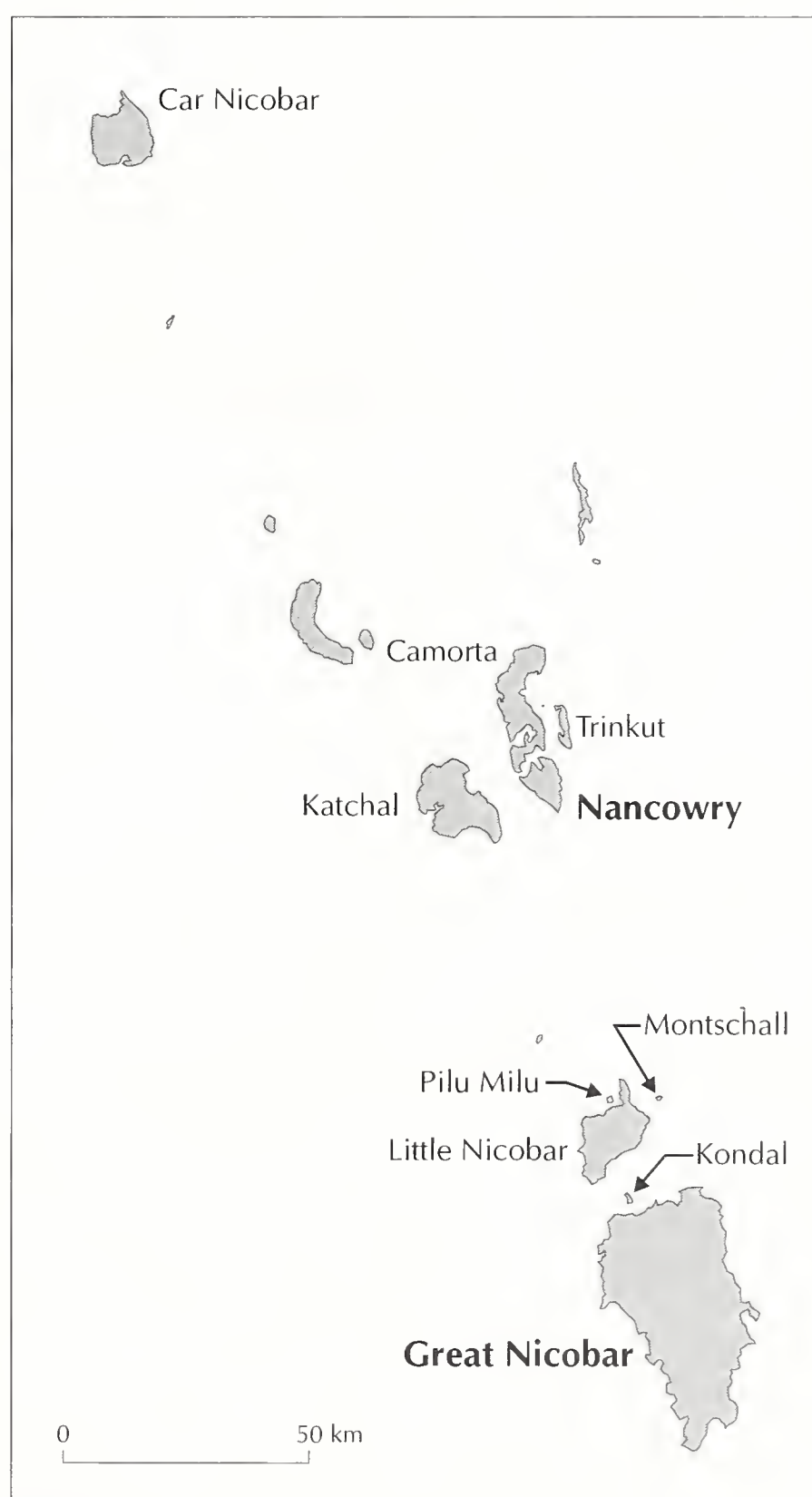


Figure 1. The Nicobar Islands.

trading area for maritime merchants and swiftlet nests were highly sought after.

In the late 1960s, the Indian Government began settling people in the Nicobar Islands. It was only subsequently that Edible-nest Swiftlet nest collection became excessive and uncontrolled, and a species



Table 1. Population estimate of breeding pairs of the Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Nicobar group of islands based on nest counts.

| Island Group  | No. of Caves | Swiftlet nests |         | Estimated no. of breeding pairs |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|---------|---------------------------------|
|               |              | Intact         | Plucked |                                 |
| Great Nicobar | 27           | 82             | 498     | 261 – 580                       |
| Nancowry      | 7            | 851            | 357     | 980 – 1222                      |
| Car Nicobar   | 2            | 3              | 0       | 3 – 3+                          |
| Total         | 36           | 936            | 855     | 1244 – 1791                     |

that had apparently withstood exploitation successfully for over two and a half centuries began declining rapidly. From March to May 1995 I visited the Nicobar Islands with the aims of locating, enumerating and assessing the size of nesting colonies of Edible-nest Swiftlets and assessing the extent of nest collection in these colonies.

Current swiftlet populations

The Nicobar group, with 23 islands (12 inhabited) covering an area of 1,841 km<sup>2</sup>, is located north-west of the northern tip of Sumatra. The Nicobars are divided into the Great Nicobar sub-group consisting of 11 islands and islets, four of which are inhabited, the Nancowry sub-group consisting of 10 islands and islets, seven of which are inhabited, and the Car Nicobar sub-group consisting of two islands, of which only Car Nicobar is inhabited (Figure 1).

Swiftlet caves were located with the help of nest collectors or by boating along the coast and looking for caves. It is relatively easy to identify nests that have been taken as they leave marks on the rock face, although how long these marks persist is unknown. Many of the caves are also used by White-bellied Swiftlets *C. esculenta* and a species of bat. However, each of the three species tends to cluster with conspecifics in discrete colonies.

Of the 60 caves surveyed in the Nicobar Islands, swiftlets or bats were present in 51. Edible-nest Swiftlets were nesting in 36 caves, occupying exclusively 15 caves, and together with *C. esculenta* in 21, of which 17 also held bats. The Great Nicobar group has 27 caves with breeding Edible-nest Swiftlets, but the population is less than that of the Nancowry group although the latter has only seven active caves. Car Nicobar has only caves holding Edible-nest Swiftlet, one of which could not be adequately surveyed owing to rough seas, but the population is probably about 15–20 pairs. The population of breeding pairs of Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Nicobar group was estimated to be between 1,244 and 1,791 (Table 1).

The nest collectors

Nest collection apparently begins at the end of February and involves Indian mainlanders, Nicobaris, and Thai poachers. Colonies harvested by Indian mainlanders are visited at least once every eight to 10 days. They operate in at least nine caves in the Great Nicobar group and at least two caves in the Nancowry group. All nests are plucked irrespective of whether or not there are chicks or eggs in them.

The Nicobaris also harvest nests holding chicks or eggs collected, but their collection intensity is less than the mainlanders. Indeed, the only chicks or eggs seen during my survey were in colonies collected by Nicobaris. There are traditional nest collection rights among the Nicobaris, with some caves ‘owned’ exclusively by single families. Historically, at least, the swiftlet colonies in these caves would have been managed so that nest collection did not cause significant population falls.

Thai poachers, who come to the Nicobar Islands between November and April-May, also collect nests. There are several colonies which are particularly affected by them although I do not know their nest collection technique, but presumably they too have little regard for nests with eggs or chicks in them.

Declining swiftlet population

Nest collection had taken place in two-thirds of Edible-nest Swiftlet colonies, but those left alone tended to have few (less than five) nests. Disturbingly, all the nests were collected in half of the 24 colonies where harvesting occurred, and more than 90% taken in a further four colonies. Only in one cave where traditional practices are still followed was the ratio of nests collected to those present very low (6%). The importance of this cave for swiftlets is evident when considering that just over half (53%) of the nests seen during the survey were intact, but this falls to only 19% if the traditionally managed cave is excluded.

The importance of traditional management is even clearer when the population trends in six



Table 2. Past and present nest yields for some caves in the Nicobar islands.

| Island Group  | Cave nos. | Nest Collectors |        | Ownership Status <sup>1</sup> | Yield in kg/year |           | % Decline |
|---------------|-----------|-----------------|--------|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|
|               |           | Non-tribal      | Tribal |                               | 8+ yrs ago       | Now       |           |
| Great Nicobar | CN 2      | Yes             | No     | Common                        | 30-50+           | <1.5-2.95 |           |
|               | CN 3,4,5  | Yes             | Yes    | Common                        | 20+              | <4        | 80        |
|               | CN 6,7,8  | Yes             | Yes    | Common                        | 2-4              | <0.5      | 75-90     |
| Nancowry      | CN 43     | Yes?            | Yes    | One family                    | 5-6              | <0.25     | 95        |
|               | CN 45     | No              | Yes    | One family                    | 4-5              | 4-5       | 0         |
|               | CN 47     | No              | Yes    | One family                    | 8-10             | 3-4       | 40-70     |

<sup>1</sup> Very few caves are ‘owned’ in the Nicobar islands. Those noted as ‘common’ in the table indicate that any nest collector who has access to the cave collects nests from it. Those that have been noted as ‘one family’ indicate that nest collection rights are with a single Nicobari family; rights are based on who discovered the colony and are hereditary (apparently matriarchal).

Edible-nest Swiftlet caves are examined. Declines in yield range between 40% and 95% depending on the patterns of nest collection, but the only swiftlet colony that had not apparently undergone a significant loss in yield was the traditionally managed one (Table 2). Overall I estimate that the Edible-nest Swiftlet population in the Nicobar Islands has declined by 85% or more.

Juvenile mortality in swiftlets is probably high, so populations can remain stable only by high breeding success, which is not the case in colonies with heavy nest collection pressures. An additional problem is that continuous nest collection results in the nest building phase of the breeding season being unduly prolonged. Young swiftlets fledging from a renesting attempt will tend to leave the nest at or after the onset of the south-west monsoon, which would almost certainly decrease their chances of survival because of the low availability of insects in this season.

With two swiftlet species and a bat competing for space within many of the caves, a reduction in population of one species apparently results in its space being occupied by one or both of the other two species (see<sup>5,10</sup>). This was seen in some caves where entire walls of caves which once were covered with nests of Edible-nest Swiftlets, are now occupied by either White-bellied Swiftlets or bats. This suggests that even protection alone may not help populations to recover because an increase in numbers will be possible only if the Edible-nest Swiftlets out compete the other two and regain nesting space.

**Saving the Edible-nest Swiftlet**

Although most caves in the Nicobar Islands which had Edible-nest Swiftlets in the past continue to have

them today, the reduction in population is so great that this species ranks amongst India’s most threatened birds. Swiftlet nest harvesting has to be carefully managed if populations are to remain stable but I believe sustainable harvesting is not possible in the Nicobar Islands. Most caves are accessible only during the peak breeding season, so it would not be possible to control nest collection at a time when recommended harvest regimes require a 135-day closed period<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, as most caves are exploited by several independent collectors, regulating collection would not be feasible.

In India, the Edible-nest Swiftlet receives no protection under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act (1972). An immediate measure to take therefore is the inclusion of the species on Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972). It certainly meets the necessary criteria for inclusion, but ensuring protection of swiftlet caves will be difficult owing to their locations so this protection would probably be ineffective.

Swiftlets are currently not covered by international trade laws. However, stopping trade in nests is the only remedial measure that has a chance of success. As all consignments of nests that move between the islands do so by inter-island ships, and move from the island to the mainland by ship or flight, trade in the swiftlet nests can be reduced by subjecting all cargo and baggage leaving the islands and entering the mainland, to a rigorous ‘customs check for animal products’.

There is a need to control international trade in Edible-nest Swiftlet nests by including the species on Appendix I of CITES. Even its inclusion on Appendix II of CITES will prove beneficial to declining populations like those in the Nicobar Islands, as ‘Importing countries could accept only nest shipments which were accompanied by export permits issued by a specific government agency’<sup>7</sup>.



This would result in a much-needed curb on nests of Indian origin in the importing countries which would greatly help in the conservation of the Edible-nest Swiftlets in India.

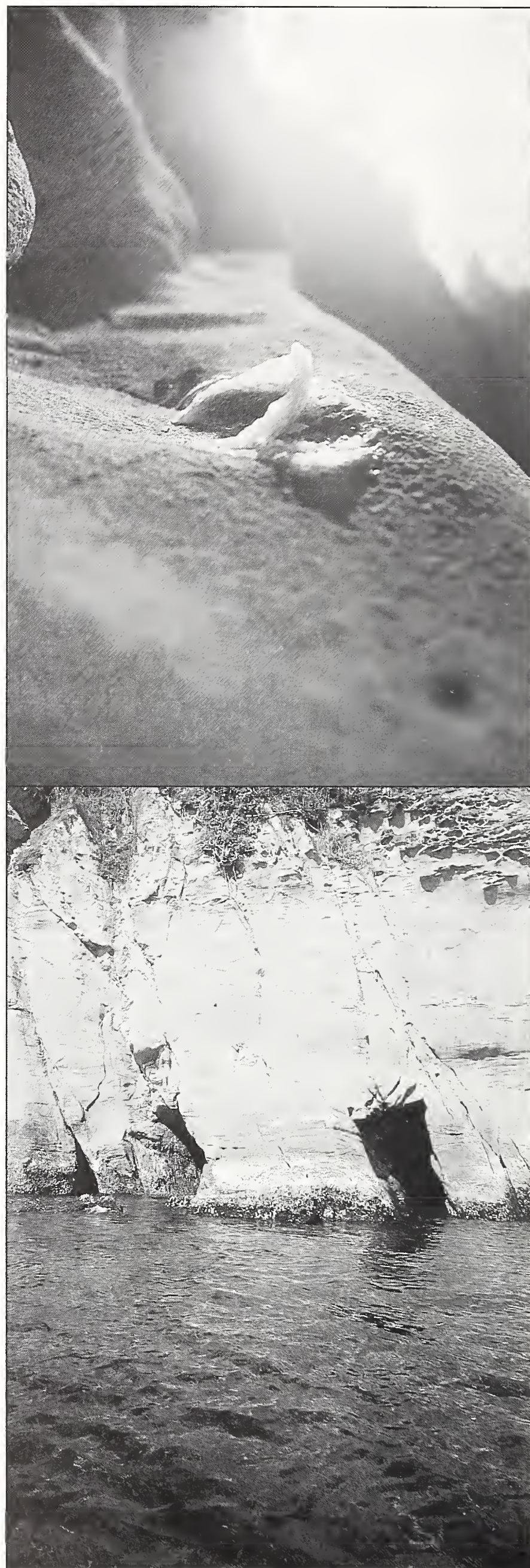
### Acknowledgements

This study was funded by TRAFFIC-India/WWF-India, and I thank Mr Vivek Menon, Brig. R. Talwar and Mr Ram Veer Singh for the interest shown. I am grateful to the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department for their support and help. I thank Drs V. S. Vijayan, Lalitha Vijayan, Ajith Kumar, H. S. Das and Mr Madhusudan Katti for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. This paper is a version of the survey report *Impact assessment of nest collection on the Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Nicobar Islands*. SACON Occasional Report 1.

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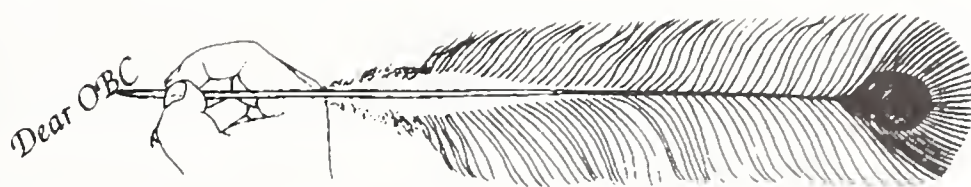
**Ravi Sankaran**, Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Kalampalayam P.O., Coimbatore - 641 010, India.



Above, Edible-nest Swiftlet nest and below, typical Edible-nest Swiftlet cave.



# To the editor



## What is the range of Jerdon's Nightjar?

Ali and Ripley<sup>1</sup> treated the different forms of Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* inhabiting the Indian subcontinent as subspecies. The range for *atripennis* was given as the southern part of the peninsula, approximately south of 18°N, with the related subspecies *aequabilis* in Sri Lanka. The rest of the subcontinent from Pakistan to Assam was described as occupied by *albonotatus*, with *ambiguus* just reaching Nagaland and Manipur, and *andamanicus* in the Andaman Islands.

Some recent works have split *atripennis* as a separate species, Jerdon's Nightjar: Sibley and Monroe<sup>5</sup> confined the range to peninsular India and Sri Lanka, whereas Howard and Moore<sup>4</sup> included *albonotatus* with *atripennis* and *aequabilis* with *macrurus*.

A recent comment by S. Harrap<sup>2</sup> drew my attention to the distinctive slow call of Jerdon's Nightjar, and made me review recordings I made in Durgapur (23°30'N 87°15'E), West Bengal in 1968. A series of calls give ten *chaunks* in 47 seconds, which is much slower than that described for *macrurus*. Ali and Ripley<sup>1</sup> give the calling speed of *albonotatus* as five *chaunks* in four seconds and White's recording<sup>6</sup> of *macrurus* is clearly faster than one per second. S. Harrap kindly listened to a copy of my recording from West Bengal and confirmed that it is Jerdon's Nightjar. On this evidence the range of Jerdon's Nightjar should be extended 900 km north-east to West Bengal. West Bengal (apart from Calcutta and Darjeeling) has been very little explored ornithologically and other studies by the author<sup>3</sup> have found range extensions in the area.

In 1969 I recorded another nightjar at Kaziranga, Assam and from its rapid call, 50 *chaunks* in 31 seconds, I assumed it was Grey Nightjar *C. indicus*; however, S. Harrap confirmed that it is *macrurus*.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to S. Harrap for drawing attention to the possibilities of my Indian recordings and for identifying the calls on tape, and to Wildsounds for providing the equipment to play the tape.

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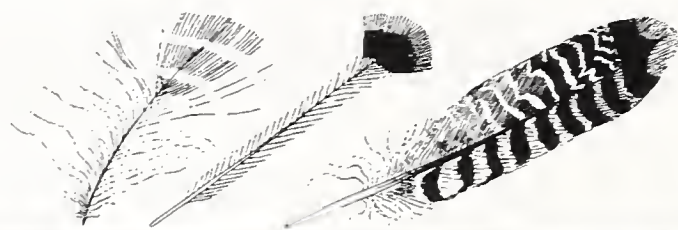
**F. M. Gauntlett**, 55 Larkfield Avenue, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 8NQ, UK.

*Tim Inskipp writes* This letter raises several points that require clarification. The distinctness of *atripennis* has long been appreciated by some authors. Baker<sup>1</sup> described the call of *atripennis* as very different from that of *albonotatus* but Ali and Ripley claimed that it was identical. Mees<sup>2</sup> described morphological differences between *atripennis* and *albonotatus* and noted an overlap in their range on the east side of India, with *atripennis* extending north to 20°N in Puri District, Orissa, and *albonotatus* south to 18°N. Later, Mees<sup>3</sup> treated *atripennis* as a separate species, based on morphological and vocal differences (with sonagrams) and the overlap in range with *albonotatus*. Ripley and Beehler<sup>4</sup> demonstrated sympatry of the two forms in Andhra Pradesh at 18°N. The record of *atripennis* from Orissa reduces the range extension proposed above, but Durgapur is still 230 km north of Puri. The difference in treatment between Sibley and Monroe and Howard and Moore draws attention to a recurrent problem in the latter work: the authors' attempts to follow taxonomic splits has frequently led to subspecies being misplaced in the constituent species.

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# Stray feathers



## 1996 Conservation Expedition awards fund opens

People from around the world are being invited to apply for a share of the £34,000 fund on offer in the 1996 BP

Conservation Programme. This BP programme is managed in conjunction with two leading conservation organisations, BirdLife International and Fauna and Flora International. Its objective is to promote a greater quantity and quality of conservation-oriented expeditions which address global priorities and offer long-term benefit to the host country.

Since the programme was launched, 75 teams from 40 countries have been supported and have gathered important data on an impressive list of globally threatened species including more than 80 species of birds (8% of the world's threatened birds).

Projects planned for 1996 will be considered for support provided they address a global conservation priority, cooperate with an institute or authority in the host country, and offer the potential for long term sustained conservation gain. The 13 awards range from £1,500 to £10,000 and are made in four categories: a) Globally Threatened Species; b) Oceanic Islands and Marine Habitats; c) Tropical Forest; d) Wetlands; e) Grasslands, Savannas and Deserts

Applications must be received by 31 December 1995. Further details of the programme and application information can be obtained from The Expeditions Officer, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA, UK  
Tel: +44(0)1223 277318  
Fax: +44(0)1223 277200  
Email: birdlife@gn.apc.org

## Wader photos wanted

I am interested in any wader photographs (not necessarily of the highest quality) of species which have been recorded in India, for a proposed book. All photos received will be returned, if requested, and all collaborators will be fully acknowledged in the book. Please contact: Damodar Lal, B. 27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Khatipura, Jaipur, 302 021, India.

## Discover Indonesia in association with BirdLife Indonesia Programme

Below are details of two expeditions led by Discovery Ecotours in association with the BirdLife Indonesia Indonesia Programme. For more details on both expeditions contact Discovery Ecotours fax 0011 61 89811102 or phone 0011 61 89 811100.

*Supertramps of the Banda Sea: an expedition to the seabird colonies of the Banda Sea:* beginning in Kupang, on the island of Timor, this expedition

explores the little surveyed, internationally significant, sea-bird rookeries in the Banda Sea. The route is the inner Banda Arc from Kupang to Manuk Island and the Banda Isles. From here we head southwest to the Lucipara Islands and Gunung Api, all tiny volcanic peaks in the middle of the Banda Sea, caused by the shunting of three of the Earth's tectonic plates. The final leg will involve sailing part of the Lesser Sunda Islands to Bima on Sumbawa. The trip has been organised to coincide with the breeding season of the seabirds. This allows us to check the status and numbers of seabirds in this remote and important region, which is poorly known biologically, and we hope to document new breeding sites and possibly new record for birds in this biogeographic crossroads between Australia, New Guinea and Oceania. The vessel is a luxurious Pinisi with twin, air-conditioned cabins, most with adjacent bathroom facilities. Scuba included. Dates: 16-27 April 1996, 12 days, US\$4,080, all inclusive and including accommodation on night before and after the trip. Maximum 24 persons, minimum 15.

*Endemic birds of the Moluccas (Maluku):* beginning in Kupang and ending in Ambon, this trip explores the birds and habitats of island paradises that have had no recent bird inventories, even though they are



considered some of the richest endemic bird areas in the world. Here is a chance for keen birders to contribute significantly towards the conservation of endemic Indonesian birds. From Timor we cruise to Wetar to look at the largely unknown birdlife of this piece of Gondwana in Indonesia. Wetar is a mountainous island, clothed in savanna forests with pockets of jungles. After Wetar we will explore the archipelago of the Western Daya Islands, in particular Romang, Leti, Sermata, Babar, Damar and islands of the Tanimbars. This region has been identified by BirdLife International as critically important for

biodiversity conservation. On Damar we look for the endemic flycatcher, not seen since last century – nobody has looked! We will stop off briefly in the Banda Isles on our way to Ambon. 13 days: 30 Sept-12 Oct, 1996, US\$3,567, all inclusive. Vessel is the Dhuta Bahari, a comfortable Pinisi with air-conditioned cabins. Maximum 18 persons, minimum 15.

### Request for Arctic Warbler songs

I am studying the songs of Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, especially the difference in song pattern between

subspecies. I would be most grateful for any recordings of Arctic Warbler songs, especially from their breeding grounds. Please send any information to: N. Kataoka, 586-7 Ajimaminami, Tannan-Cho, Taki-Gun Hyogo, 669-22, Japan.

### Pheasant, Partridge, Quail and Francolin symposium postponed

The World Pheasant Association has been asked by the Malaysian Wildlife Department to postpone their planned symposium from January 1996 (see *Stray Feathers* in *Bull. OBC* 21: 65-66) until September or October 1997.



## From the field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from December 1994 to September 1995. We urge that, if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

### GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The following notes are intended to help contributors decide which records to submit for inclusion in this section of the bulletin. *From the field* is distribution-orientated and intended to provide a regular source of up-to-date, unpublished new information. The following kinds of data are of particular value:

- Records which considerably extend documented range (including altitude)
- Records of vagrants and rarities
- Records of resident species which have not been recorded for many years and are considered rare or have restricted ranges
- Records of seriously threatened and erratically recorded residents, particularly from new sites
- Unusual breeding records
- Unusually high counts

### BURMA (MYANMAR)

A spring tour of the Chin Hills (West Burma) and parts of Upper Chindwin (West Burma), Central and South Burma (HB, DF, TF, BK, CR) discovered two new species for the country: a single **White-throated Needletail** *Hirundapus caudacutus* near Mindat, south Chin Hills, on 6 April, and **Russet Bush-Warbler** *Bradypterus seebohmi* on Mount Victoria, south Chin Hills, on 31 March (single heard), and at Ramhtlo (Ramkhla), north Chin Hills, on 8 April (at least nine singing birds). The following species were new for the Chin Hills and West Burma as a whole: a single male **Crimson-breasted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos cathpharius* on Mount Victoria on 3 April; **Himalayan Swiftlet** *Collocalia brevirostris* on Mount Victoria on 3 April (four) and at Bonzon, central Chin Hills, on 8 April (single); a single **Blue-eared Kingfisher** *Alcedo*



meninting at Bonzon on 8 April; single **Eurasian Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter nisus* on Mount Victoria on 31 March and 3 April and two more near Mindat on 6 April; **Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* on Mount Victoria on 31 March-4 April (up to two), near Mindat on 6 April (single), near Haka, north Chin Hills, on 8 April (single), and between Ramhtlo (Ramkhla) and Thiangin, north Chin Hills, on 10 April (single); a single summer-plumaged **Chinese Pond-Heron** *Ardeola bacchus* at Bonzon on 8 April; **Long-tailed Thrush** *Zoothera dixonii* on Mount Victoria on 1 April (three) and near Mindat on 6 April (single); a single **Brown-breasted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa muttui* at Ramhtlo on 10 April; **Blue-fronted Redstart** *Phoenicurus frontalis* on Mount Victoria on 1-4 April (up to ten), near Mindat on 6 April (two) and at Ramhtlo on 9 April (five); two pairs of **Little Forktail** *Enicurus scouleri* at Ramhtlo on 10 April; **Asian House-Martin** *Delichon dasypus* on Mount Victoria on 31 March-4 April (up to 60), between Bonzon and Haka on 8 April (up to 30) and between Ramhtlo and Thiangin on 10 April (four); three **Chestnut-flanked White-eyes** *Zosterops erythropleurus* on Mount Victoria on 2 April; **Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler** *Cettia fortipes* on Mount Victoria on 30 March-5 April (common) and at Ramhtlo on 8-10 April (common); five **Slender-billed Scimitar-Babblers** *Xiphirhynchus superciliosus* on Mount Victoria between 31 March and 4 April; and a single **Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum melanoxanthum* near Mindat on 6 April. The occurrence of two other species in this region was confirmed with sightings of a single **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* between Haka and Ramhtlo on 8 April and three **Streak-throated Fulvettas** *Alcippe cinereiceps* at Ramhtlo on 9 April. The following species previously recorded from other parts of West Burma were recorded for the first time in the Chin Hills: a single **Brown-headed Gull** *Larus brunnicephalus* at Laiva Dam, near Ramhtlo on 8 April; a single **Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* near Mindat on 5 April; two **Hooded Treepies** *Crypsirina cucullata* between Mindat and Kangyi, south Chin Hills, on 7 April; up to 12 **Black-winged Cuckoo-shrikes** *Coracina melaschistos* at Ramhtlo on 8-10 April, and **Rufous-fronted Babbler** *Stachyris rufifrons*, which was heard near Mindat on 5 April and at Bonzon on 8 April. In addition, four species were confirmed for the Chin Hills: **Green-billed Malkoha** *Phaenicophaeus tristis* near Mindat on 5 April (two) and at Ramhtlo on 9-10 April (two); **Ashy Wood-Pigeon** *Columba*



White-browed  
Nuthatch *Sitta  
victoriae* by Dave  
Farrow

*pulchricollis* on Mount Victoria on 1-4 April (fairly common), at Mindat on 6 April (four) and at Ramhtlo on 9-10 April (26 birds); **Oriental Honey-buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* on Mount Victoria on 3-4 April (two) and at Mindat on 6 April (single); and three **Plumbeous Water-Redstarts** *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* at Ramhtlo on 9 April. A male **Blyth's Tragopan** *Tragopan blythii* was seen briefly on Mount Victoria on 31 March, a fresh feather found near Mindat on 6 April and a preserved wing examined at Ramhtlo on 9 April. Up to 14 **White-browed Nuthatches** *Sitta victoriae*, a little-known Burmese endemic, were located in the summit area of Mount Victoria on 1 and 3 April, and another three birds were found near Mindat on 6 April; the latter site is only the second recorded for this species which, was previously thought to be restricted to Mount Victoria, some 22 km to the south-east. Three **White-rumped Vultures** *Gyps bengalensis* at Ramhtlo (2,590 m elevation) on 9 April were also of interest. Further north, at Aung Chan Tha, to the east of Kalewa, the following species were recorded for the first time in Upper Chindwin, on 11-12 April: A single **Brown Hornbill** *Anorrhinus tickelli*, up to eight **Olive Bulbuls** *Iole virescens* and two **Dark-necked Tailorbirds** *Orthotomus atrogularis*. The sighting of ten **Rufous-fronted Babblers** confirmed the species' occurrence in this region. Two **Dark-necked Tailorbirds** between Saw and Mindat on 5 April and **Yellow-streaked Warblers** *Phylloscopus armandii* at Pagan on 29 March (eight), between Pagan and Saw on 30 March (at least 20) and between Saw and Mindat on 5 April (several), were new records for Central Burma. **Oriental Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus orientalis* was confirmed for the latter region with a single seen at Pagan on 29 March. Subsequent fieldwork in the northern Chin Hills (PR, SN, KT, SM, TL) found the first **Banded Bay Cuckoo** *Cacomantis sonneratii* for this region, with a single near Laumtuk on 16



April, and confirmed the presence of the following: **Pale-chinned Flycatcher** *Cyornis poliogenys*, near Laumtuk on 14 and 16 April; a single **Siberian Blue-Robin** *Luscinia cyane* near Laumtuk on 14 April; a female **Golden Bush-Robin** *Tarsiger chrysaeus* on Kennedy Peak on 27 April; and a single **Nepal House-Martin** *D. nipalensis* near Laumtuk on 15 April. **Streak-throated Fulvetta** was found to be abundant on Kennedy Peak on 25-28 April. An adult male **Eastern Marsh-Harrier** *Circus spilonotus* at Hlawga Park, near Rangoon (Yangon) on 1 April, was the first for South Burma (PR, TL).

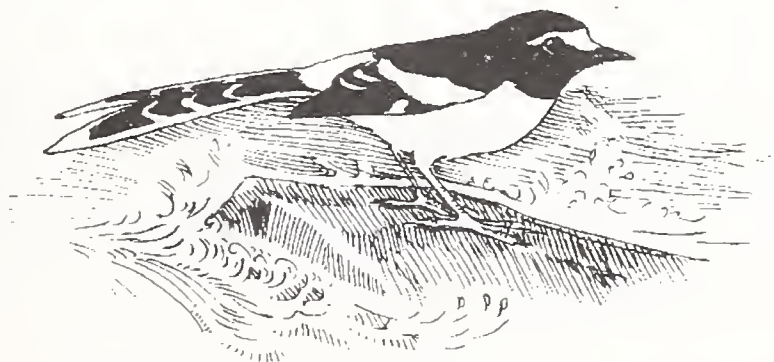
## CAMBODIA

A single **Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula*, seen on the south bank of the Se Kong River, along the border with Laos on 12 May (RT), was the first record for the country.

## CHINA

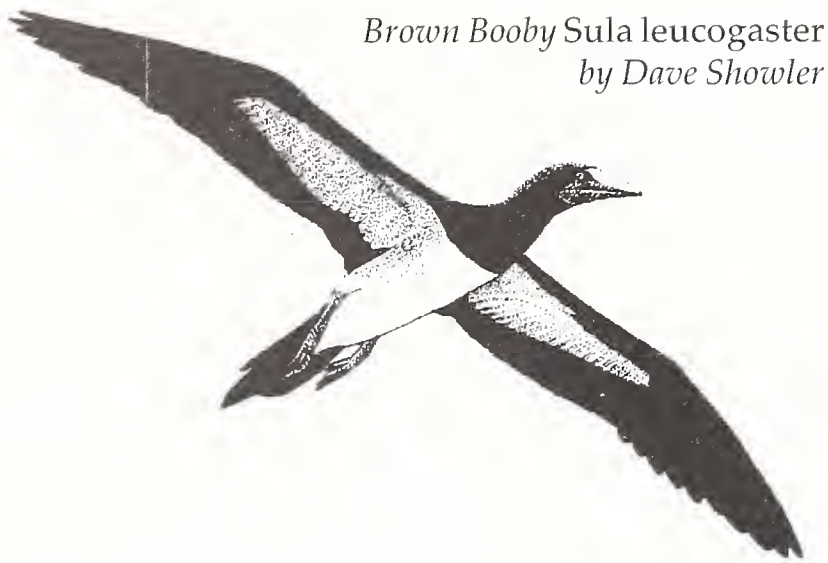
A trip to Hainan Island in late April (PD, DF) found two new records for the island: up to 15 **White-throated Needletails** *Hirundapus caudacutus* at Jianfengling Forest Reserve on 25th-26th and a single male **Japanese Paradise-Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* at the same site on 27th. Additionally, on the outward boat trip from Guangzhou to Haikou, at least two **Pomarine Jaegers** *Stercorarius pomarinus* and 11 (one flock) **Parasitic Jaegers** *S. parasiticus* were counted, the latter being only the second record for China. A number of interesting range extensions were noted at Ba Bao Shan, north Guangdong, in early May (PD, DF): up to 12 singing **White-browed Shortwings** *Brachypteryx montana* on 3rd and 7th; a single **Plain-backed Thrush** *Zoothera mollissima* on 5th; a singing male **Pale Blue-Flycatcher** *Cyornis unicolor* on 6th-7th; one or two singing male **White-tailed Robins** *Cinclidium leucurum* on 3rd and 7th; and up to five **Grey Laughing-thrushes** *Garrulax maesi* daily. Also of note at Ba

Bao Shan were two to four **Rusty Laughing-thrushes** *G. poecilorhynchus* daily and several **Golden-breasted Fulvettas** *Alcippe chrysotis* on 3rd and 7th, both of which had been noted here in 1994 (NB, SC, RM). Up to three **Black-winged Kites** *Elanus caeruleus* at Gutien Reserve, Guangdong, on 14-16 April and another bird 30 km north of Putian (Chengxiang), Fujian, on 25 June (TW) appear to be the first records from these provinces and suggest that this species is expanding its range in China. Birding in the Riuli (Ruili) area, south-west of Tengchong, west Yunnan (JC, JH), proved fruitful with the sighting of a **Black-backed Forktail** *Enicurus immaculatus* on 14 February, apparently the first for China. Sightings of a single **Rusty-naped Pitta** *Pitta oatesi* on 4 February and **Rufous-necked Laughingthrush** *Garrulax ruficollis*, which was common, appear to be the first from west Yunnan. Two **Collared Mynas** *Acridotheres albocinctus* on 31 January were also interesting but had previously been observed in the same area in 1992 (JC). Two **White-cheeked Partridges** *Arborophila atrogularis* observed at Wanding (Wandingzhen), north-east of Riuli in late January (JH) were the first to be recorded in China for many years. At Zhangdian (Zhongdian), north-west Yunnan, sightings of 45 **Black-necked Cranes** *Grus nigricollis*, ten **White-tailed Eagles** *Haliaeetus albicilla* and two **Imperial Eagles** *Aquila heliaca* in February (KK) were noteworthy, as were numbers of **Falcated Duck** *Anas falcata*, **Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*, **Ferruginous Pochard** *A. nyroca* and **Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* on a lake near Lijiang (KK). At Wolong Panda Reserve, west Sichuan, sightings of two **White-browed Fulvettas** *Alcippe vinipectus* on 12 and 14 May (DF) were some distance to the north-east of their previously documented range and at least five **Crimson-browed Finches** *Pinicola subhimachalus* on 11-12 June (PD, DF) were unusual. Further north, at Jiuzhaigou Panda Reserve, north Sichuan, a nest of **Rufous-headed Robin** *Luscinia ruficeps* containing four eggs, was discovered on 28 June (PD) and appears to be the first known to science. Up to two or more **Barbary Falcons** *Falco pelegrinoides* in the hills immediately north of Xining, Qinghai, on 10, 27 and 30 July (PD, JH), constitute an easterly range extension. A new and relatively accessible site for **Tibetan Bunting** *Emberiza koslowi* was discovered at Kanda Shan, c. 25 km north of Nanqen, Qinghai, where at least nine birds (including seven singing males) were observed in late July (PD).



*Black-backed Forktail Enicurus immaculatus by Dave Farrow*





*Brown Booby Sula leucogaster*  
by Dave Showler

## HONG KONG

Two firsts were recorded during the period under review, an adult **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*, seen off Cape D'Aguilar on 28 May and a **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* at Dong Ping Chau on 23 April. Single **Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoos** *Cuculus fugax* at Tai Po Kau on 4 April and Cheung Chau on 7 April were the third and fourth Hong Kong records and an adult **Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* at Deep Bay on 8 March was the fourth record. A **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Mai Po from 19 March to 20 April was the first since 1989, and a single **Great Crested-Tern** *Sterna bergii* at Tsim Bei Tsui on 15 April was the seventh record. Two **Grey Nightjars** *Caprimulgus indicus* at Yung Shue O on 19 June provided the first summer record since 1939, and **Slaty-backed Forktail** *Enicurus schistaceus* was found breeding in Hong Kong for the first time at Ng Tung Chai. Also of note were one or two **Brown Crakes** *Amaurornis akool* at Shuen Wan, Kat O Chau and Mui Wo from 17 May, a breeding-plumaged **Chinese Egret** *Egretta eulophotes* at Mai Po on 16 July (the first summer record since breeding ceased in 1982), a first summer **Black Bittern** *Dupetor flavicollis* at Mai Po on 20-23 August and up to 15 **Japanese Grosbeaks** *Eophona personata* at Tsim Bei Tsui and Lam Tsuen on 7-9 April. (All records: The Hong Kong Birdwatching Society).

## INDONESIA

### Ambon

Four new species for the island were found this year (MP): A single **Fork-tailed Swift** *Apus pacificus* in Ambon Town on 23-24 August, a **Terek Sandpiper** *Tringa cinerea* in Passo Bay on 3

September, single **Peregrine Falcons** *Falco peregrinus* in Ambon on 10 February and near Laha on 12 February (the latter definitely subspecies *ernesti*) and single **Intermediate Egrets** *Mesophoyx intermedia* at Passo on 2 July and 27 August and at Galala on 6 September. In addition, a jaeger, provisionally identified as **Pomarine Jaeger**, was observed between Ambon and Pulau Pombo.

### Halmahera

A single **Invisible Rail** *Habroptila wallacii* was briefly heard calling in sago swamp forest near Sidangoli on 28 April (MP) and said to have been seen recently by local people. Also of interest were flocks of **Nicobar Pigeons** *Caloenas nicobarica* seen flying over Buli during mornings and evenings, presumably to and from offshore islets; one flock on 25 March totalled 85 birds (MP). A large arrival of **Rainbow Bee-eaters** *Merops ornatus* was noted on 25-27 April (MP), with 50-100 birds seen daily on 27-31 April.

### Haruku

A brief visit to this island on 6 September (MP), resulted in the following new records: a single **Sacred Kingfisher** *Todirhamphus sanctus*, 80 **Rainbow Bee-eaters**, a single **Lesser Coucal** *Centropus bengalensis* (heard), several **Glossy Swiftlets** *Collocalia esculenta*, a single **Spotted Dove** *Streptopelia chinensis*, eight **Pied Imperial-Pigeons** *Ducula bicolor*, five **Red-necked Phalaropes** *Phalaropus lobatus* offshore, a single **Great Crested-Tern** *Sterna bergii*, eight **Bridled Terns** *S. anaethetus* offshore, a single **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*, a dark-phase **Pacific Reef-Egret** *E. sacra*, four **White-breasted Woodswallows** *Artamus leucorhynchus*, three **Willie-wagtails** *Rhipidura leucophrys*, ten **Barn Swallows** *Hirundo rustica*, four **Pacific Swallows** *H. tahitica*, five **Black Sunbirds** *Nectarinia aspasia* and three **Olive-backed Sunbirds** *N. jugularis*. In addition, the same observer was shown a photograph of a further new species, **Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio*, taken on the island (ET).

### Seram

Interesting recent records included a single **Peregrine Falcon** near Mosso on 7 May and a large flock of c. 90 **Australian Pelicans** *Pelecanus conspicillatus*, found roosting on a small islet near Besi on 10 September (both MP).



## Ternate

An adult winter **Common Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus* in Ternate harbour on 17 February (MP) was the second record from the island and only the third for Wallacea.

## LAOS

Surveys in the proposed Xe Nam Noy hydro-electric project area, south-east Bolovens Plateau, south Laos, during March and April (TE, RT, JD, BS), resulted in sightings of at least one **Blyth's Kingfisher** *Alcedo hercules* (the first for south Laos), a party of four or five **Pale-capped Pigeons** *Columba punicea*, a single **Lesser Fish-Eagle** *Ichthyophaga humilis* and good numbers of **Nepal House-Martins** *Delichon nipalensis* (another first for south Laos). Parts of the adjacent Xe Pian National Biodiversity Conservation Area were also surveyed in April and May (TE, RT, BS), resulting in sightings of a single **Giant Ibis** *Pseudibis gigantea* on three dates in early May and a party of three **White-shouldered Ibises** *P. davisoni* on several dates in early May. Other highlights included at least five **Masked Finfoots** *Heliopais personata* in early May, several **Lesser Fish-Eagles**, two **Grey-headed Fish-Eagles** *I. ichthyæetus* in April, small numbers of **White-backed** and **Red-headed Vultures** *Gyps bengalensis* and *Sarcogyps calvus* in May, several **Malayan Night-Herons** *Gorsachius melanolophus* (perhaps the first confirmed records for South Laos), several **Woolly-necked Storks** *Ciconia episcopus*, including a party of six, and a single **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus* in early May. Particularly encouraging, was the discovery of a total of twelve **White-winged Ducks** *Cairina scutulata* in four areas and reports from several other sites, mostly outside the reserve. In upstream areas outside the reserve there were sightings of up to three **Masked Finfoots**, several **Lesser Fish-Eagles** and several **Malayan Night-Herons**.

White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*  
by Craig Robson



## THAILAND

At least 215 **Spotted Redshanks** *Tringa erythropus* and two **Rufous-necked Stints** *Calidris ruficollis* at Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai, on 25-27 March (CR, DF) were apparently new records for north-west Thailand. In the south, four nests of **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus* were reported at Chalerm Prakiat (Pa Phru) Wildlife Sanctuary, Narathiwat, in April, and two birds were reported from Ko Mai Kgam, near Ko Lanta, Krabi, on 25-26 June (*per UT*). Single summer-plumaged **Indian Pond-Herons** *Ardeola grayii* were reported from Tambol Leh, Phang-nga, on 15 April (SS, KR, PK *et al.*), Khao Sam Roi Yot, Prachuap, on 20 April (WT), and Bang Poo, Samut Prakan, on 7 May (SS, KR, PK *et al.*) and 13 May (AK, KS). There is only one previous Thai record and still some doubt cast over records by intermediate-plumaged Chinese Pond-Herons *A. bacchus*. Other interesting records during the period under review were a **Chinese Egret** *Egretta eulophotes* and a **Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola* at Laem Pakarang, Phang-nga, on 12 April (SS, KR, PK *et al.*), at least three **White-browed Laughingthrushes** *Garrulax sannio* at Den Ya Khat, Doi Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, Chiang Mai, on 10 March (CR) and two pairs of **House Sparrows** *Passer domesticus* found nesting in the roof of a temple out-building at Samchuk, Suphanburi, on 14-15 June. The latter two species are still expanding their ranges in Thailand.

## VIETNAM

Interesting sightings, received too late for inclusion in bulletin 21, included three new species for the country: a male **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* east of Haiphong, East Tonkin, on 25 December (KK), up to two or more **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis* in the vicinity of Ninh Binh, East Tonkin, on 15, 18 and 22 December (JC, KK) and a single **Yellow-streaked Warbler** *Phylloscopus armandii* at Cuc Phuong National Park, East Tonkin, on 19 December (JC). The former two species are also new for Indochina. Other interesting winter records included a single **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* at Phu Long, Cat Ba Island, East Tonkin, in December (KK), two **Imperial Eagles** *A. heliaca* at Ninh Binh on 22-23 December (JC), two **Common Starlings** *Sturnus vulgaris* at Ninh Binh on 23 December (JC), two **Dusky Crag-Martins** *Hirundo concolor* at Tuyen Lam, near Da Lat, South Annam, on 27 December (JC) (the first for this region), and two



**Common House-Martins** *Delichon urbica* at Cat Tien (Nam Bai Cat Tien) National Park, Cochinchina, on 6 January (JC). A spring birdwatching tour of the country (CR, UO - Regulus) discovered five new species for the country: three **Amur Falcons** *Falco amurensis*, amongst other migrating raptors, over Lo Qui Ho, near Sa Pa (Chapa), West Tonkin, on 5 May; three **Brown-breasted Flycatchers** *Muscicapa muttui*, including a pair nest-building, near Lo Qui Ho on 5 May; two different male **Sapphire Flycatchers** *Ficedula sapphira* near Lo Qui Ho on 3 and 4 May; a singing **Spotted Wren-Babbler** *Spelaornis formosus* near Lo Qui Ho on 3 May; and, most remarkable, at least 15 **Grey-capped Greenfinches** *Carduelis sinica*, including a female accompanying three begging fledged offspring, at Ninh Chu, near Phan Rang, South Annam, on 22 April (also the first record for South-East Asia); another three birds were seen at Viet Tri, East Tonkin, on 1 May. A number of new species were recorded for West Tonkin: a single **Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo** *Cuculus fugax* heard near Lo Qui Ho on 2 May; at least two **Silver-backed Needletails** *Hirundapus cochinchinensis* near Lo Qui Ho on 5 May; at least 15 **Japanese Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter gularis*, 22 **Chinese Goshawks** *A. soloensis* and two **Eurasian Hobbies** *Falco subbuteo*, all moving east or north-east over Lo Qui Ho (1,900 m elevation) on 5 May; up to four **Chestnut-vented Nuthatches** *Sitta nagaensis* near Lo Qui Ho on 2 and 4 May; and two **Yellow Wagtails** *Motacilla flava* between Cam Duong and Lao Cai on 1 May. **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* was confirmed for the region, with at least five in the vicinity of Lo Qui Ho on 2-3 May. At least three **Pale-legged Leaf-Warblers** *Phylloscopus tenellipes* at Tam Dao on 7 May were the first for East Tonkin. Further south, a single **Rufous-bellied Eagle** *Hieraaetus kienerii* in the Net River watershed, near Ho Ke Go, Ha Tinh on 27 April, was the first for North Annam. **Crow-billed Drongo** *Dicrurus annectans* was fairly common at the same locality and found breeding, during 26-28 April. A nest of **Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*, containing one egg, was found at Cam Ranh bay, South Annam, on 22 April, confirming that the species breeds in Vietnam and South-East Asia. A female **Baillon's Crane** *Porzana pusilla*, found in a small marsh between Di Linh and Da Lat on 19 April, was the first record for South Annam. while at Cat Tien National Park, Cochinchina, a record total of 27 **Woolly-necked Storks** was counted, including 19 in one flock.

## MALAYSIA

A subadult male **Asian Emerald Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx maculatus* at Kuala Kenyam, Taman Negara, on 29 January (AJ, JS) appears to be only the third record for West Malaysia.

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**Erratum:** Under the Bhutan section of *From the field* in Bull. OBC 21, *Alcippe brunnea* should read *Alcippe dubia*.





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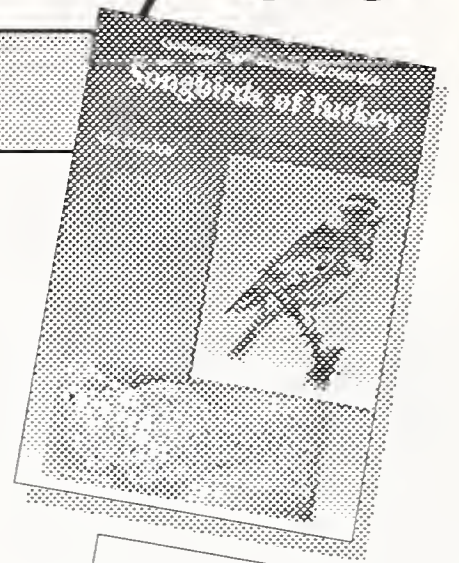
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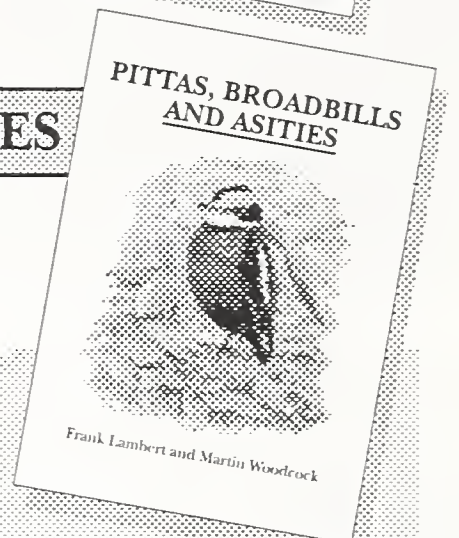
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## Recently published

**Birds of hill region of Karnataka** by A. K. Chakravarthy and K. P. Purna Chandra Tejasvi. Navbharath Enterprises, 1992. 148 pp, (sb).

This attractive book covers 294 bird species recorded in Chikmagalur district in the Western Ghats, India, during surveys undertaken between 1983 and 1986. There are short accounts of plumage, behaviour and status. A useful description of the natural resources of the region is also included. The book is illustrated throughout with many good-quality colour and monochrome photographs, line drawings and maps.

**Birds of Rishi valley** by S. Rangaswami and S. Sridhar. Rishi Valley Education Centre, 1993. 235 pp, (hb).

This interesting and unusual book begins with an account of the intensive and successful efforts made by the Rishi Valley School to restore gradually water and green cover to a long-degraded landscape in southern India. In 1980, 150 acres of adjoining hillside were leased to the school. The hillside was terraced with check-dams to conserve rain water, thousands of trees and shrubs were planted and a lake was created. Everyone in the school took part. In 1990, after an absence of 12 years, one of the authors, Mr S. Rangaswami, formerly the school's bursar, noted a striking increase in the variety of birds around the school. He organised a group of associates and the school's students to compile an up-to-date field guide to birds of the valley. This forms the major part of the book. There are descriptions of 170 bird species occurring in the valley, including plumage details, habits, habitat, food, calls, breeding numbers and status. The book also includes useful chapters on birdwatching for beginners, a history of bird studies in India, basic principles of bird taxonomy and classification, and plant biodiversity of the Rishi valley. The book is illustrated with numerous excellent colour photographs taken by S. Sridhar and attractive colour illustrations by Gerry Balcombe.

**Indian Birds** by R. K. Gaur. Brijbasi Printers, 1994. 120 pp, (hb).

This beautiful book is primarily a portfolio of superb photographs of Indian birds taken by Lt. Gen. R. K. Gaur. Each photograph is accompanied by an informative and detailed caption. In the main text, he presents a short and readable overview of Indian birds, their habitats, behaviour and migration, and bird sanctuaries. There is a chapter on birdwatching and photography, which should be especially useful for beginners.

**Checklist of the birds of Sri Lanka** by D. P. Wijesinghe. Ceylon Bird Club, 1994. 49pp, (sb).

Priyantha Wijesinghe has compiled an excellent new list of the birds of Sri Lanka. This updates his earlier list of 1989 and the last edition of W. W. A. Phillips' *Annotated checklist of the birds of Ceylon*, 1978. Both the list of species and nomenclature have been revised. The new list comprises 425 species including 236 breeding species. It is especially useful as all species and subspecies are annotated with status information. In addition, there are sections on geography and distribution, a discussion of classification and nomenclature, and maps of annual rainfall and climatic zones.

Carol Inskipp

**Birds of Xinjiang [Xinjiang Niao lei Jianjie]** by Ma Ming. Taipei, Jeson Consultant Press. 1995. NT\$800 [in Chinese].

This book features colour photographs of 100 species from the vast desert region of Xinjiang in Chinese central Asia and is edited by the region's foremost ornithologist. Some 431 species have been recorded in Xinjiang, and these are listed in an appendix. Also included are a brief introduction, a sketch map of the region's nature reserves and a bibliography. This is a useful contribution, which will hopefully inspire more foreign birdwatchers to visit this little-known region. It is encouraging to note that this book is



published in Taiwan, reflecting the fact that for birds and birdwatchers political divisions should be no real obstacle. The text is in Chinese, but scientific names are given (and there are English names in the photographic captions).

*Michael Rank*

**Belum: a rainforest in Malaysia** by G. W. H. Davison. *Malaysian Nature Society*, 1995. ISBN 983968115X.

In 1988, the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) published *Endau Rompin: a Malaysian heritage*, a coffee-table book describing the results of the first major scientific expedition, taking the reader to the forests of the Johor-Pahang State border. It is arguably one of the best, if not the best, pictorial guide to any of the world's tropical rainforests, and documents one of the region's most successful conservation initiatives, undertaken in Malaysia, by Malaysians, for Malaysians. Belum, in north-eastern Perak State, bordering Thailand and Kelantan, has been the location of the MNS's second major expedition and *Belum: a rainforest in Malaysia* is its respective pictorial guide.

For over 50 years, the area around Belum had been out of bounds, designated a Security Area owing to the presence of communist guerillas. In 1989, a settlement was signed with the Malaysian Government and, suddenly, several hundred thousand hectares of relatively undisturbed tropical rainforest became accessible. The MNS was quick to see the conservation potential of such an area and a scientific expedition was born. From 1993-1994 almost 1,000 Malaysians became involved, and the book documents, with some beautiful photographs, just some of the data they collected on subjects ranging from geology to fungi.

The birds are dealt with in five pages in the chapter entitled Forest Fauna. Over 210 species were recorded, the most exciting discovery being the huge number of hornbills – in November over 2,000 were counted flying to an evening roost. The identity of these birds is still uncertain; although the book records them as Wreathed Hornbills *Aceros undulatus*, there is mounting evidence that they may well be Plain-pouched Hornbills *A. subruficollis*, and further evidence is awaited from, among other things, an OBC-funded study being carried out this autumn. It is a pity

that the book does not contain any of the photographs of these larger flocks.

Of the bird photographs, those by Morten Strange are of his invariably impeccable standard, the rest are unexceptional, and it is odd also to see photographs of two species never recorded during the expedition. A Malaysian ornithologist casually flicking through the book would apply the brakes, only to find on reading the text that Golden-crested Myna *Ampeliceps coronatus* has not been recorded from the area for a very long time, whilst White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* never has.

Why also include photos taken in captivity? They only serve to undermine, rather than enhance, a book of this quality and nature. Several of the bird shots look very suspicious, whilst those of Tiger *Panthera tigris* illustrate the issue clearly. A series of three shots of a swimming Tiger, are arguably the most exciting pictures in the book, providing a wonderful feeling of an encounter with a wild animal in its natural environment. However, 100 pages on is a full-frame shot of a tiger obviously taken in captivity: we have all seen such photographs before and they do nothing to boost the argument for habitat conservation.

And it is promoting the conservation of this habitat, the future of Belum, that is the book's most important role and will be its major achievement. Following the Endau Rompin expedition, that area is being designated a State Park by both Johor and Pahang; the hope now is that the same can be achieved for Belum. Currently, however, the future looks uncertain: the MNS has submitted a plan to the Perak State Government to gazette 220,000 ha as a State Park, but much of the area is reportedly already earmarked for logging.

In its overall finish and quality, *Belum: a rainforest in Malaysia* does not quite live up to the high standards set by *Endau Rompin: a Malaysian heritage*, but this is not to take anything away from it. It is a splendid tribute to a valuable and vulnerable area. Buy it and immerse yourself in the diversity and beauty that are the forests of Malaysia. If only all the country's relevant decision makers did this, then the future of Belum would be secured tomorrow.

*Colin Poole*



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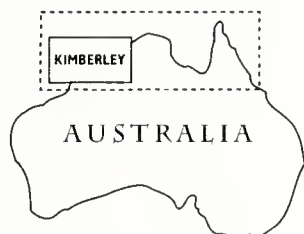
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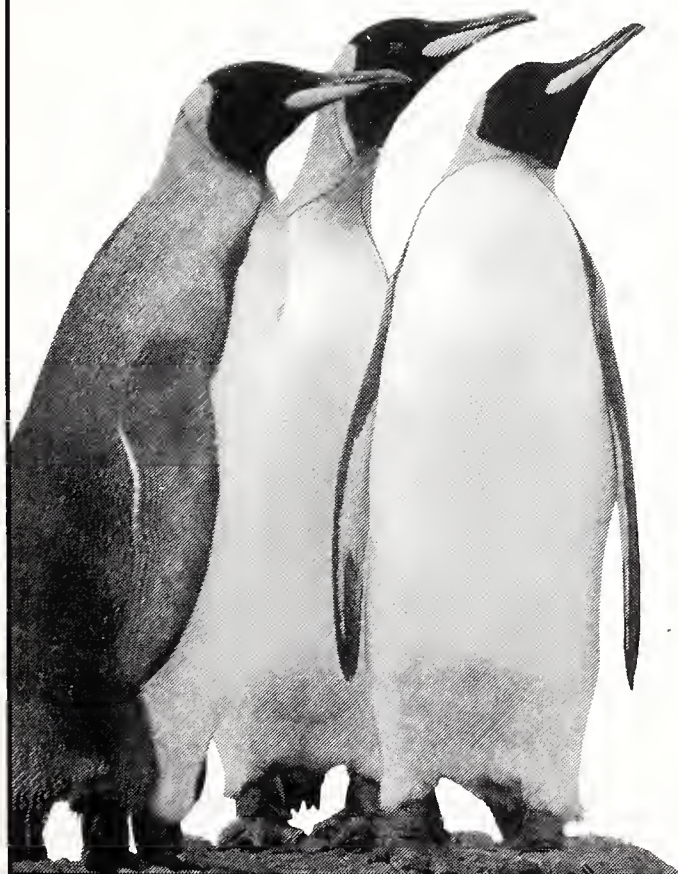
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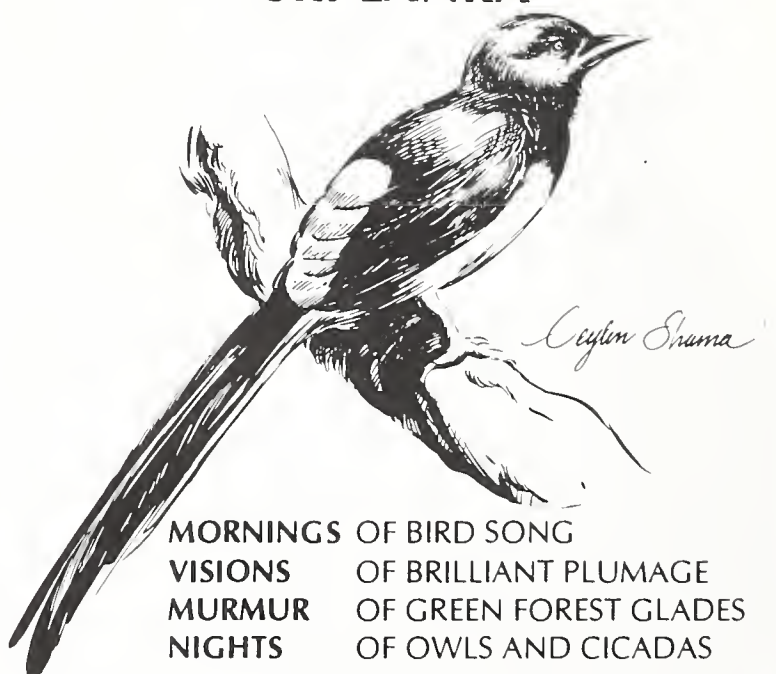
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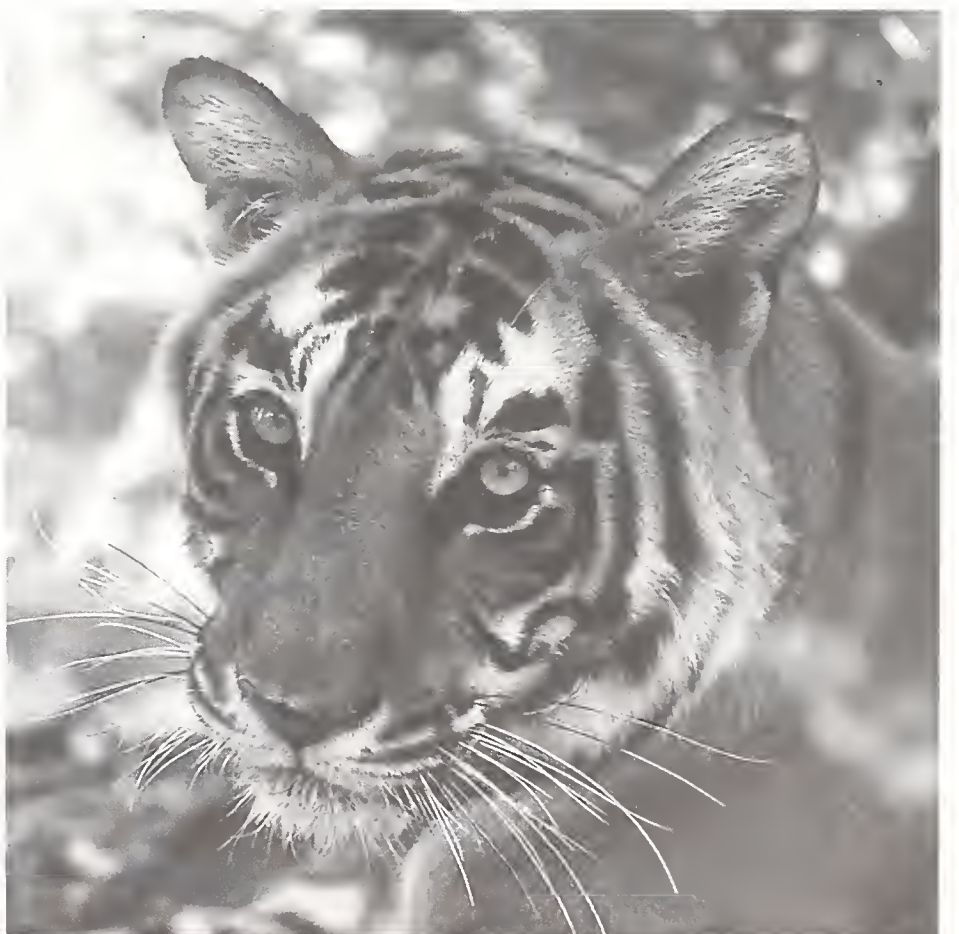
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1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow C. G. Sibley and B. L. Monroe (1990) *Distribution and taxonomy of birds of the world*.

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2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, U.K.

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